# Dennis Hopper
## INTERVIEWS

Edited by Nick Dawson

# Dennis Hopper: Interviews

Conversations with Filmmakers Series
Gerald Peary, General Editor

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Edited by Nick Dawson

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# Introduction

I met Dennis Hopper in June 2009, just under a year before his death. It was in Las Vegas, at the CineVegas Film Festival where Hopper was chair of the Creative Advisory Board. I was there to do a Q&A with Jon Voight following a screening of the director's cut of *Lookin' to Get Out*, a Vegas-set gambling comedy starring and co-written by Voight, and directed by Hal Ashby. (I had uncovered the film while researching my book *Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel*.)

I was in Jon Voight's room at the Palms Hotel a few hours before the screening when Hopper unexpectedly dropped by. I remember being struck by this former hell-raiser's quiet grace and composure. At this time, Hopper's battle with cancer had already been widely reported and I recall thinking that he had a fitting dignity and gravitas for a man who knew his days were numbered. I shook his hand and said hello, but I was otherwise at a loss for words. As someone who has met and interviewed a great many filmmakers, I am no longer starstruck. No, with Hopper, I was tongue-tied for a different reason.

When I was growing up, there were many actors whose work I admired, but nobody who I found more viscerally compelling than Dennis Hopper. He represented the dark, uncomfortable side of the American male, a raw masculine energy that was infectious, even though at its very core was an instability that tended toward madness. Hopper ignited the screen every time he appeared, and never disappointed regardless of the quality of the films he was in.

In addition to his acting work, I had seen a number of the films Hopper directed, which were all interesting if not always particularly good. As a teenager, I would periodically watch *Catchfire*, a strange and strangely beguiling film that Hopper directed about a reclusive hitman (played by Hopper) who falls for and ultimately wins the heart of the woman he's been hired to kill (Jodie Foster), a conceptual artist who witnessed a mob slaying. Hopper disowned the film after it was recut against his

wishes, but what remains is fascinating in its flaws. There was, and still is, an intoxicating quality to this seductively lurid movie.

Also during my teens, I recall watching a revelatory BBC documentary about Hopper in which, most memorably, he recalled how, as a young boy, he used to take the cap off the gas tank of his grandfather's truck and inhale deeply. Lying on the roof the truck, high on the fumes, he saw fantastical things as he looked up at the clouds in the sky. Once, he got so high that he came to believe that the truck was a monster, and attacked the beast with a baseball bat, smashing it up badly. Decades later, this story is still vivid in my memory.

As I watched others talk to him in that Vegas hotel suite, I pondered what I might say to Dennis Hopper, beyond banalities such as "I love your work," or "You're one of my heroes." I wanted to engage Hopper in conversation, to ask him a question—but there were so many Dennis Hoppers. There was the actor with a career spanning more than fifty years, who started off playing angel-faced delinquents and ended up as one of Hollywood's favorite villains. There was the mercurial, underrated director whose talents extended way beyond his era-defining *Easy Rider*, the movie that sparked the New Hollywood revolution. There was the legendary Hollywood bad boy who had been friends with James Dean and whose off-screen antics were every bit as compelling as the plot of any movie he'd ever appeared in. There was Hopper the painter and sculptor, Hopper the photographer, Hopper the art collector and self-professed "gallery bum" who was a lynchpin of the L.A. scene. And there was Hopper the recovering addict, a man who had put his wild past behind him, kicked drugs and alcohol and, aging gracefully, became a poster boy for good, clean living.

So, what do you ask a man who has experienced and achieved so much? In his presence, I remained reverent but almost mute. I did not know where to start, or how to pick one aspect of his manically busy life over all the others. (As a biographer, I was strongly drawn to Hopper, until I realized it might take me my whole life to do justice to researching his!)

When Hopper died, 11 months later, I dug out the picture of myself standing awkwardly next to him in Voight's hotel room and thought back on my missed opportunity, on all the questions I had failed to ask him on that day. This book is, among other things, my attempt to right that wrong. Hopper was a generous, eloquent, and expansive interview subject who always talked openly about both his life and his work, and so *Dennis Hopper: Interviews* provides answers—in his own words—to so many of the questions I could and should have asked that day.

Shortly before Hopper's death in 2010, *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis wrote an appreciation of Hopper; a pre-obituary, as it were. It began, "Dennis Hopper—actor, filmmaker, photographer, art collector, world-class burnout, first-rate survivor—never blew it. Unlike the villains and freaks he has played over the decades—the psycho with the mommy complex in *Blue Velvet*, the mad bomber with the grudge in *Speed*—he has made it through the good, the bad, and some spectacularly terrible times. . . . He has been rich and infamous, lost and found, the next big thing, the last man standing."

It is certainly true that, as Dargis says, Hopper never "blew it." (Dargis here echoes that famous line in *Easy Rider*, "We blew it.") However, there is a case that can be made that Dennis Hopper's cinematic imprint should have been much more significant. In the 1990s, he was a wonderfully over-the-top baddie in big, splashy blockbusters like *Waterworld*, *Speed*, and *Super Mario Bros.* but when roles in high-profile movies dried up, he chose to keep on working regardless. As a result, for the last decade of his life he was reduced to TV work, supporting roles in movies with small theatrical releases, or playing villains in straight-to-DVD fare. His last film was the children's animation *Alpha and Omega*, in which he voiced the role of Tony, a cartoon wolf.

Hopper not only had to settle for substandard roles as an actor in his final years—decades earlier he had been forced to rebuild his career from scratch not once, but twice. First, he was blackballed after an infamous spat with director Henry Hathaway on the 1958 Western *From Hell to Texas* and was essentially exiled from Hollywood for eight years. Then, in 1969, Hopper had the world at his feet after the phenomenal success of *Easy Rider*, which he directed, co-starred in, and co-wrote. However, just two years later, his iconoclastic (and prophetically titled) *The Last Movie* so baffled and offended both audiences and critics that Hopper was back in the wilderness again. He licked his wounds at his hippie retreat in Taos, New Mexico, and then only acted in independent and foreign films. It was not until 1986, a full fifteen years after the release of *The Last Movie*, that a trio of great performances—in *Blue Velvet*, *River's Edge*, and *Hoosiers* (for which he was Oscar nominated)—marked Hopper's true return to Hollywood.

Hopper's rebellious, edgy personality was integral to his powerful presence on screen, but it was the manifestation of this personality offscreen that alienated those people in Hollywood who were in a position to make or break his career. In the two years between *Easy Rider* and *The Last Movie*, Hopper went from messiah to pariah. Poised to be an actor-director who would make influential and interesting films, Hopper saw

his opportunity to establish himself as a true revolutionizing force in Hollywood disappear before his very eyes. So, while we rightly celebrate him for his significant contribution to American cinema, it's clear that, had things gone differently, he might have achieved so much more, both in front of and behind the camera.

In the 1980s, Hopper's return to Hollywood was aided by Francis Ford Coppola, Sam Peckinpah, Robert Altman, and Bob Rafelson, who gave him supporting roles in *Rumble Fish*, *The Osterman Weekend*, *O.C. and Stiggs*, and *Black Widow*, respectively. However, if he had played his cards differently, Hopper could easily have been a leading man for those same directors ten years earlier, when he would have been a perfect post-Watergate anti-hero and grown much more as an actor than he did playing, say, the titular deranged Australian outlaw in *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), or Chicken, the hallucination-prone junkie in the bizarro Italian thriller *Bloodbath* (1979).

Hopper's first directing job after *The Last Movie* was on the Canadian independent film *Out of the Blue* in 1980, but he did not get to direct a Hollywood movie again until he was hired to helm the L.A. gang film *Colors* in 1988. His career as a director was defined by a tension between freedom and control: with the revolutionary *Easy Rider*, made on a very limited budget, Hopper made a movie that audiences found familiar yet intoxicatingly new. On *The Last Movie*, arguably a surfeit of freedom and creative control resulted in a film that was too radically different—to the extent that it killed his career behind the camera stone dead. Hopper saw himself as being primarily to blame for *The Last Movie*'s failure, admitting he misunderstood what people had responded to in his debut: "I'd gone around to universities selling *Easy Rider*, and everybody was saying, 'We want new movies, we want new movies,'" Hopper said in the *Film Comment* interview included in this volume. "I said, 'Boy, have I got a movie for you.' In point of fact, what they really wanted was 1940-opiate kind of movies where they didn't have to do a lot of thinking—what Spielberg and Lucas came up with."

Like *Easy Rider* and *The Last Movie*, *Out of the Blue* was stylistically innovative and had a raw emotional energy. However, it would be the last of Hopper's movies to be made with such creative abandon. When Hopper directed *Out of the Blue*, he had nothing to lose: he had been hired as an actor on the film and, when the original director was fired weeks into production, he was asked to step in and take over. During his years in the wilderness, however, Hopper longed to get back into Hollywood's good graces enough to be offered a directing job, so much so that when he fi-

nally got that opportunity, his approach to filmmaking changed noticeably. He moved back behind the camera with *Colors*—and then *Catchfire*, the neo-noir *The Hot Spot*, and the naval-themed comedy *Chasers*—but now chose to play it safe. He found small ways to stamp his personality on these movies, but the adventurous, trailblazing spirit that makes his first three films special was sadly absent.

While we reflect on the great Hopper movies that might have been, we must not lose sight of a series of performances that were not committed to celluloid, but are still there for us to enjoy: his interviews. It is naïve to think that when a movie star is giving an interview he is not acting, and Hopper was certainly no exception. Lawrence Schiller, co-director of *The American Dreamer*, the seminal documentary about Hopper shot during postproduction on *The Last Movie*, tells a revealing story about Hopper as a performative interviewee. While Hopper was cutting the film, he left his house in Taos to travel to Los Angeles to meet Charles Manson, then in jail following the Tate/LaBianca murders. On his return to Taos, Schiller and his co-director, L. M. Kit Carson, interviewed Hopper and noted that he "became" Manson, channeling the murderous cult leader in his speech and manner.

In interviews, Hopper always carefully crafted his image. Following the success of *Easy Rider*, he positioned himself as a kind of cinematic idiot savant: he might talk about the gospel of Thomas or hold forth on the history of art, but then would follow any such seemingly intellectual or academic statements with the contention that he had never read a book and that all he knew about culture he'd learned at the Museum of Modern Art. (In 1959, however, he was described as an avid reader of Nietzsche and foreign plays.) Hopper was not only positioning himself as a cultural outsider, but also playing off his perception that, despite his success, the studios looked upon him as completely unexceptional: in a 1983 interview with Michael Heaton, he self-deprecatingly declared, "After *Easy Rider*, they thought anybody that could ride a bicycle could direct a movie."

In the 1980s, as Hopper made his return to Hollywood, he put himself forward as a man who had been punished for his transgressions and had learned his lessons from life. After years of alcoholic and narcotic excess, he finally got clean and, from 1983 onwards, began preaching the gospel of Alcoholics Anonymous, the twelve steps, and recovery. But again, the image cannot be totally reconciled with the actions: Hopper later conceded that, while he gave up booze in '83, he continued to take drugs in

large quantities for a year or so after, believing that only his drinking was a problem. In Hopper's 1986 *Film Comment* interview, Chris Hodenfield asked him what state he was in when he made *The Osterman Weekend*. "I wasn't drinking. I don't think I was drinking," replied Hopper. "You were pulling on a beer and a joint at the same time," countered Hodenfield. "Was I?" asked Hopper, with a laugh. "I was trying to get sober. I had tried to stop when I came on that picture."

While he was initially playing the role of ambassador for sobriety, Hopper soon stopped having to act, as he became that man in earnest: He had been to the brink but had come back and turned his life around. And, like all great interviewees, he lived to tell the tale.

The interviews in this book clearly map the arc of Dennis Hopper's career—after all, you are only successful when you're being written about. In the late 1950s, there are interviews given when Warner Bros. was grooming the handsome and gifted twenty-something Hopper for stardom, such as Jane Wilkie's "Rebel from Dodge City" (for which I am indebted to John Lichman). However, they abruptly stop following his misbehavior on *From Hell to Texas*, and things go quiet for more than a decade.

Though Hopper spent the majority of his career discussing *Easy Rider* in interviews, it's indicative of what a surprise the film's success was that there were relatively few interviews conducted at the time of its release. (L. M. Kit Carson's landmark piece for *Evergreen*, "*Easy Rider*: A Very American Thing," is from November 1969, while the movie had come out back in July.) The hysteria over *Easy Rider* manifested itself in the coverage of *The Last Movie*, shot in early 1970, for which Universal Pictures launched a massive press assault, sending legions of reporters out to Peru to visit the set. This resulted is a glut of vivid reportage of Hopper's grand folly, with articles like Tom Burke's "Dennis Hopper Saves the Movies" and Edwin Miller's "Dennis Hopper Makes *The Last Movie* in Peru" affording us remarkable insight into the chaos of the shoot.

Following the resounding failure of *The Last Movie*, Hopper still gave occasional interviews, despite not having a movie to promote. It was his fall from grace that provided journalistic fascination now, while the lack of a publicity agenda make articles like Lawrence Linderman's expansive conversation with Hopper for *Gallery* all the more interesting: we see Hopper free to discuss such subjects as what went wrong with *The Last Movie*, his relationships, his drug-taking, and his tumultuous times in Taos.

In the 1980s, *Out of the Blue* and then the triple impact of *Blue Velvet*, *Hoosiers*, and *River's Edge* announced Hopper's return and lead interviewers to note that his craziness was now manifested on the screen rather than off. He did a large number of interviews to mark the release of *Colors*, his first studio directing job in seventeen years, but after that Hopper was seldom interviewed as anything other than a supporting actor who directed sporadically, a definite impact of the less compelling nature of his subsequent work behind the camera. Ultimately, he became one of those actors whose iconic status and compelling backstory make them irresistible as interview subjects, even if the films that they are promoting are less than great.

This series is titled "Conversations with Filmmakers," however, in these pages I've tried to present a fully rounded picture of Hopper in his many incarnations. Thus, I've included David Dodd's interview with Hopper about his struggles with drug and alcohol abuse from the book *Playing It Straight*, and art dealer Tony Shafrazi's conversation with Hopper about art and photography for *Index* magazine. I am indebted to Jean Stein, who granted me permission to reprint two fantastic, unique pieces from *Grand Street*: "Larry Flynt at Home: Dennis Hopper/Terry Southern," which sheds light on the unhinged Hopper of the early 1980s, just before he got clean and sober, and "Blood Lust Snicker Snicker in Wide Screen," in which Hopper takes his turn as the interviewer, asking Quentin Tarantino about his career. We also see a unique view of Hopper in "American Psycho," a no-holds-barred profile from 2001, written for *Observer* newspaper by Lynn Barber. (Barber is best known to U.S. audiences for the Academy Award–nominated adaptation of her memoir *An Education*, but British readers know her as arguably the most feared and ruthless interviewer in U.K. journalism.)

In the final interview in this book, Alex Simon's career overview conversation with Hopper for *Venice* magazine, Hopper touched on one of the aspects of his personality that made him impossible not to like: his ability to survive. His closing words in that article are on that very subject: "I think it was genetics. I think it was luck. I think it was attitude that got me through a lot of it. I believe in miracles. It's a miracle that I'm still here. And I plan on being here a while longer." Through his body of work, his remarkable life story, and also through this book and many others, Dennis Hopper will be around for a very long time.

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# Chronology

1936 Born Dennis Lee Hopper on May 17 in Dodge City, Kansas, to Jay Millard Hopper and Marjorie Mae Hopper.

1946 Moves with family from Dodge City to Kansas City, Missouri.

1950 Moves to San Diego, California, where he becomes involved with the city's Old Globe Theatre. Subsequently, he takes summer jobs at the Pasadena Playhouse and La Jolla Playhouse, the latter run by film actress Dorothy Maguire and her husband, photographer John Swope, who mentor Hopper.

1954 Voted most likely to succeed by his graduating class at Helix High School in La Mesa, California.

1955 Following his appearance on an episode of the TV show *Medic* as an epileptic, Hopper receives contract offers from several Hollywood studios. Hopper signs with Warner Bros., and his first credited film role is in *Rebel Without a Cause*, starring James Dean. During the shooting of *Giant*, in which Dean plays the lead and Hopper a supporting role, Dean dies in a car accident, aged just twenty-four.

1956 *Giant* is released.

1957 Plays Napoleon Bonaparte in *The Story of Mankind*.

1958 While making the Western *From Hell to Texas*, Hopper has a famous falling out with the film's director, Henry Hathaway, who is intolerant of Hopper's Method approach to acting. Subsequently, Hopper is blackballed by Hollywood.

1959 Studies under Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio in New York City.

1961 Marries Brooke Hayward, the daughter of actress Maureen Sullavan and Hollywood agent Leland Hayward, after acting opposite her in a Broadway production of *Mandingo*. Starts working as a photographer for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Plays the lead in the independent film *Night Tide*, directed by Curtis Harrington.

1962 Hopper and Brooke Hayward have a daughter, Marin.

1964 Appears in Andy Warhol's films *Tarzan and Jane Regained . . . Sort of* and *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys*. Hopper's contact with Warhol originates from his involvement in the Los Angeles art scene centered around the Ferus Gallery. He subsequently appears in a number of Warhol's *Screen Test* movies.

1965 Acts in the Western *The Sons of Katie Elder*, directed by Henry Hathaway, ending his exile from Hollywood.

1966 Reteams with director Curtis Harrington on the horror *Queen of Blood*.

1967 Plays a supporting role in Roger Corman's *The Trip*, an LSD movie starring Brooke Hayward's stepbrother, Peter Fonda, and written by Jack Nicholson. Hopper and Fonda collaborate on directing second unit footage for the film. Has a small role in *Cool Hand Luke*.

1968 Appears in the Western *Hang 'Em High* and has a cameo in Bob Rafelson's Monkees vehicle, *Head*, which is co-written by Rafelson and Jack Nicholson. Directs and acts in *Easy Rider*, an existential motorcycle movie with a screenplay by Hopper, Peter Fonda (who plays the lead role), and Terry Southern, and Nicholson in a supporting role.

1969 Gets divorced from Brooke Hayward, later claiming he left because of her lack of faith in *Easy Rider*. After winning the Prix de la première œuvre (Best First Film) at the Cannes Film Festival, *Easy Rider* is released by Columbia Pictures and becomes a monumental, era-defining success that grosses an initial $19 million at the domestic box office, despite costing just $340,000.

1970 Directs and acts in *The Last Movie*, his much-anticipated follow-up to *Easy Rider*, on location in Peru. At the Academy Awards, *Easy Rider* is nominated for Best Supporting Actor (Jack Nicholson) and Best Original Screenplay. Moves to Taos, New Mexico, where he edits *The Last Movie*. Marries Michelle Phillips, of the pop group The Mamas & The Papas. Their marriage lasts eight days.

1971 *The Last Movie*, despite winning the Critics Prize at the Venice Film Festival, is a critical and commercial disaster on its release. The film's failure—and rumors of Hopper's destructive, hedonistic lifestyle—greatly damages Hopper's career.

1972 Marries Daria Halprin, the lead actress in Michelangelo Anto-

nioni's *Zabriskie Point*. Their daughter Ruthanna Khalighi Hopper is born.

1973 *Kid Blue*, a comedy Western shot in 1971, is belatedly released.

1976 Divorces Daria Halprin. Goes to the Philippines to play a supporting role as a crazed war photographer in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.

1977 Plays the lead roles in *Tracks*, a U.S. independent film directed by Henry Jaglom, and *The American Friend*, Wim Wenders's adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley's Game*.

1979 *Apocalypse Now* is released.

1980 Directs, co-writes, and plays the heroine's truck driver father in the Canadian independent drama *Out of the Blue*. It is released in the U.S. in 1982.

1982 Appears in *Neil Young: Human Highway*. Father Jay Hopper dies.

1983 Plays supporting roles in Francis Ford Coppola's *Rumble Fish* and Sam Peckinpah's *The Osterman Weekend*. After a drug-induced breakdown, he is admitted to a treatment center and begins the process of recovery from alcohol and drug addiction. Moves from Taos to Venice, California.

1985 Robert Altman's teen comedy *O.C. and Stiggs*, in which Hopper plays the paranoid, war-obsessed Sponson, is released.

1986 Returns to prominence with acclaimed performances as the psychotic Frank Booth in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, the town drunk, Shooter, in *Hoosiers*, and the disturbed loner Feck in *River's Edge*. Hopper is Academy Award–nominated for his performance in *Hoosiers*.

1987 Takes supporting roles in Bob Rafelson's *The Black Widow*, Alex Cox's *Straight to Hell*, and James Toback's *The Pick-up Artist*.

1988 Directs *Colors*, an L.A.-set gang movie starring Sean Penn and Robert Duvall. It is his first Hollywood directing job since *The Last Movie* in 1971.

1989 Marries Katherine LaNasa, an actress and former ballet dancer. Plays the lead in the insane asylum drama *Chattahoochee*.

1990 Directs *The Hot Spot*, a retro noir starring Don Johnson, and *Catchfire*, the unlikely love story of a Mafia hitman who falls for his latest target, in which Hopper and Jodie Foster play the leads. After it is recut against his wishes, Hopper disowns *Catchfire*. Plays a 1960s counterculture hero in *Flashback*, a film which pokes gentle fun at *Easy Rider*. Henry Lee Hopper, Hopper's son by LaNasa, is born.

1991 Plays the title role in *Paris Trout*, for which he is Emmy nominated, and a supporting role in *The Indian Runner*, the directorial debut of Sean Penn.

1992 Divorces Katherine LaNasa.

1993 Embarks on a period of playing villains, with roles in *Super Mario Bros.*, *Boiling Point*, and *Red Rock West.* He also plays the hero's father in *True Romance*, based on a script by Quentin Tarantino.

1994 Directs *Chasers*, a quasi-remake of *The Last Detail* with a gender switch, which will be his final feature behind the camera. Draws praise for his portrayal of Howard Payne, the unhinged nemesis of Keanu Reeves' hero in *Speed*, winning Best Villain at the MTV Movie Awards.

1995 Plays Deacon, yet another enjoyable over-the-top villain, in *Waterworld*, opposite Kevin Costner.

1996 Marries Victoria Duffy, his fifth wife. Takes the role of art dealer Bruno Bischofberger in *Basquiat*, the biopic of the 1980s street artist directed by one of Hopper's art world friends, painter Julian Schnabel.

1997 Appears in Abel Ferrara's *The Blackout*.

1999 Has small roles in Ron Howard's small screen satire, *EdTV*, and *Jesus' Son*, adapted from the novel by Denis Johnson.

2000 Directs the short film *Homeless*. It is his last work as a director.

2001 Plays Benny "Chains" Demaret in the gangster film *Knockaround Guys*.

2002 Appears on TV for the first time in decades, playing Victor Drazen, the main villain on the first season of *24*.

2003 Galen Grier Hopper, his daughter by Duffy, is born.

2005 Returns to TV with a role in *E-Ring*, a Jerry Bruckheimer–produced military drama. Plays rich warlord Paul Kaufman in George A. Romero's zombie flick *Land of the Dead*.

2007 Hopper's mother, Marjorie Hopper, dies.

2008 Following numerous appearances either in straight-to-DVD movies, TV shows, or video games, Hopper appears in a string of theatrical releases, the most notable of which is *Elegy*, adapted from Philip Roth's *The Wounded Animal*, in which he plays the best friend of the protagonist David Kepesh (Ben Kingsley). On the small screen, he plays record producer Ben Cendars in *Crash*, an adaptation of the 2005 Academy Awards Best Picture winner.

2009 It is announced that Hopper is in the late stages of a battle with prostate cancer.

2010 In January, Hopper files for divorce from Victoria Duffy Hopper. In March, he is given a star on Hollywood Boulevard. He dies of complications due to prostate cancer on May 29 in Venice, California, and is buried in Taos. The animated movie *Alpha and Omega*, his last film, is dedicated to him.

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# Filmography

Over the course of his career, Dennis Hopper acted in over two hundred film and television productions. Below is a selection of his key credits as an actor, plus the eight films which he directed. For a more complete list, we recommend you consult the Internet Movie Database.

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (1955)
Warner Bros.
Producer: David Weisbart
Director: Nicholas Ray
Screenplay: Stewart Stern; Irving Schulman (adaptation); Nicholas Ray (story)
Cinematography: Ernest Haller
Production Design: Malcolm C. Bert
Editing: William Ziegler
Music: Leonard Rosenman
Cast: James Dean (Jim Stark), Natalie Wood (Judy), Sal Mineo (John "Plato" Crawford), Jim Backus (Frank Stark), Ann Doran (Mrs. Stark), Corey Allen (Buzz Gunderson), William Hopper (Judy's Father), Rochelle Hudson (Judy's Mother), Edward Platt (Ray Fremick), Nick Adams (Chick), **Dennis Hopper** (Goon)
35mm, color, 111 minutes

GIANT (1956)
Warner Bros.
Producer: George Stevens, Henry Ginsberg
Director: George Stevens
Screenplay: Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat, from the novel by Edna Ferber
Cinematography: William C. Mellor
Production Design: Boris Leven
Editing: William Hornbeck
Music: Dimitri Tiomkin

Cast: Elizabeth Taylor (Leslie Benedict), Rock Hudson (Jordan "Bick" Benedict Jr.), James Dean (Jett Rink), Carroll Baker (Luz Benedict II), Jane Withers (Vashti Snythe), Chill Wills (Uncle Bawley), Mercedes McCambridge (Luz Benedict), **Dennis Hopper** (Jordan Benedict III), Sal Mineo (Angel Obregon II), Rod Taylor (Sir David Karfrey)
35mm, color, 201 minutes

GUNFIGHT AT THE O.K. CORRAL (1957)
Paramount Pictures
Producer: Hal B. Wallis
Director: John Sturges
Screenplay: Leon Uris, from the article by George Scullin
Cinematography: Charles B. Lang Jr.
Art Direction: Hal Pereira, Walter H. Tyler
Editing: Warren Low
Music: Dimitri Tiomkin
Cast: Burt Lancaster (Marshal Wyatt Earp), Kirk Douglas (Doc Holliday), Rhonda Fleming (Laura Denbow), Jo Van Fleet (Kate Fisher), John Ireland (Johnny Ringo), Lyle Bettger (Ike Clanton), Frank Faylen (Cotton Wilson), Earl Holliman (Deputy Sheriff Charlie Bassett), Ted de Corsia (Shanghai Pierce), **Dennis Hopper** (Billy Clanton)
35mm, color, 122 minutes

FROM HELL TO TEXAS (1958)
Twentieth Century-Fox
Producer: Robert Bucker
Director: Henry Hathaway
Screenplay: Robert Buckner, Wendell Mayes, from the novel by Charles O. Locke
Cinematography: Wilfred M. Cline
Art Direction: Chester Bayhi, Walter M. Scott
Editing: Johnny Ehrin
Music: Daniele Amfitheatrof
Cast: Don Murray (Tod Lohman), Diane Varsi (Juanita Bradley), Chill Wills (Amos Bradle), **Dennis Hopper** (Tom Boyd), R. G. Armstrong (Hunter Boyd)
35mm, color, 100 minutes

NIGHT TIDE (1961)
The Filmgroup Inc. / American International Pictures
Producer: Aram Katarian; Jules Schwartz (executive producer); H. Duane Weaver (associate producer)
Director: Curtis Harrington
Screenplay: Curtis Harrington
Cinematography: Vilis Lapenieks
Production Design: Paul Mathison
Editing: Jodie Copelan
Music: David Raksin
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Johnny Drake), Linda Lawson (Mora), Gavin Muir (Capt. Samuel Murdock), Luana Anders (Ellen Sands), Marjorie Eaton (Madame Romanovitch)
35mm, black and white, 84 minutes

TARZAN AND JANE REGAINED . . . SORT OF (1964)
Producer: Andy Warhol
Director: Andy Warhol
Editing: Taylor Mead
Cast: Naomi Levine (Jane), Taylor Mead (Tarzan), **Dennis Hopper**, Brooke Hayward, Irving Blum, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Pat Oldenburg, Wallace Berman
16mm, black and white, 81 minutes

THE SONS OF KATIE ELDER (1965)
Paramount Pictures
Producer: Hal B. Wallis; Paul Nathan (associate producer)
Director: Henry Hathaway
Screenplay: William H. Wright, Allan Weiss, Harry Essex, from the story by Talbot Jennings
Cinematography: Lucien Ballard
Art Direction: Hal Pereira, Walter H. Tyler
Editing: Warren Low
Music: Elmer Bernstein
Cast: John Wayne (John Elder), Dean Martin (Tom Elder), Martha Hyer (Mary Gordon), Michael Anderson, Jr. (Bud Elder), Earl Holliman (Matt Elder), Jeremy Slate (Ben Latta), James Gregory (Morgan Hastings), Paul Fix (Sheriff Billy Watson), George Kennedy (Curley), **Dennis Hopper** (Dave Hastings)
35mm, color, 122 minutes

QUEEN OF BLOOD (1966)
American International Pictures
Producer: Samuel Z. Arkoff, George Edwards; Stephanie Rothman (associate producer); Roger Corman (executive producer)
Director: Curtis Harrington
Screenplay: Curtis Harrington
Cinematography: Vilis Lapenieks
Art Direction: Albert Locatelli
Editing: Leo H. Shreve
Music: Ronald Stein
Cast: John Saxon (Allan Brenner), Basil Rathbone (Dr. Farraday), Judi Meredith (Laura James), **Dennis Hopper** (Paul Grant), Florence Marly (Alien Queen), Robert Boon (Anders Brockman), Don Eitner (Tony Barrata), Forrest J. Ackerman (Farraday's Aide)
35mm, color, 81 minutes

COOL HAND LUKE (1967)
Warner Bros.
Producer: Gordon Carroll; Carter De Haven Jr. (associate producer)
Director: Stuart Rosenberg
Screenplay: Donn Pearce, Frank Pierson, from the novel by Donn Pearce
Cinematography: Conrad Hall
Art Direction: Cary Odell
Editing: Sam O'Steen
Music: Lalo Schifrin
Cast: Paul Newman (Luke Jackson), George Kennedy (Dragline), J. D. Cannon (Society Red), Lou Antonio (Koko), Robert Drivas (Loudmouth Steve), Strother Martin (Captain), Jo Van Fleet (Arletta), Clifton James (Carr), Morgan Woodward (Boss Godfrey), Luke Askew (Boss Paul), Marc Cavell (Rabbitt), Richard Davalos (Blind Dick), Robert Donner (Boss Shorty), Warren Finnerty (Tattoo), **Dennis Hopper** (Babalugats), John McLiam (Boss Keen), Wayne Rogers (Gambler), Harry Dean Stanton (Tramp), Charles Tyner (Boss Higgins)
35mm, color, 126 minutes

THE TRIP (1967)
American International Pictures
Producer: Roger Corman; Frances Doel (associate producer)
Director: Roger Corman
Screenplay: Jack Nicholson

Cinematography: Arch Dalzell
Art Direction: Leon Ericksen
Editing: Ronald Sinclair
Music: The American Music Band
Cast: Peter Fonda (Paul Groves), Susan Strasberg (Sally Groves), Bruce Dern (John), **Dennis Hopper** (Max), Salli Sachse (Glenn), Barboura Morris (Flo), Judy Lang (Nadine), Luana Anders (Waitress)
35mm, color. 85 minutes

HANG 'EM HIGH (1968)
The Malpaso Company / United Artists
Producer: Leonard Freeman; Irving Leonard (associate producer)
Director: Ted Post
Screenplay: Leonard Freeman, Mel Goldberg
Cinematography: Richard H. Kline, Leonard J. South
Art Direction: John B. Goodman
Editing: Gene Fowler Jr.
Music: Dominic Frontiere
Cast: Clint Eastwood (Marshal Jed Cooper), Inger Stevens (Rachel Warren), Ed Begley (Captain Wilson), Pat Hingle (Judge Adam Fenton), Ben Johnson (Marshal Dave Bliss), Charles McGraw (Sheriff Ray Calhoun), Ruth White (Madame "Peaches" Sophie), Bruce Dern (Miller), Alan Hale Jr. (Matt Stone), Arlene Golonka (Jennifer, the Prostitute), James Westerfield (Prisoner), **Dennis Hopper** (The Prophet), L. Q. Jones (Loomis)
35 mm, color, 114 minutes

EASY RIDER (1969)
Raybert Productions, Pando Company, Inc. / Columbia Pictures
Producer: Peter Fonda; William Hayward (associate producer); Bert Schneider (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: **Dennis Hopper**, Peter Fonda, Terry Southern
Cinematography: László Kovács
Art Direction: Jeremy Kay
Editing: Donn Cambern
Cast: Peter Fonda (Wyatt), **Dennis Hopper** (Billy), Jack Nicholson (George Hanson), Luke Askew (Stranger on Highway), Phil Spector (Connection), Karen Black (Karen), Toni Basil (Mary), Antonio Mendoza (Jesus), Mac Mashourian (Bodyguard), Warren Finnerty (Rancher),

Tita Colorado (Rancher's Wife), Luana Anders (Lisa), Sabrina Scharf (Sarah), Robert Walker Jr. (Jack), Sandy Brown Wyeth (Joanne)
35 mm, color, 94 minutes

TRUE GRIT (1969)
Paramount Pictures
Producer: Hal. B. Wallis; Paul Nathan (associate producer)
Director: Henry Hathaway
Screenplay: Marguerite Roberts, from the novel by Charles Portis
Cinematography: Lucien Ballard
Production Design: Walter H. Tyler
Editing: Warren Low
Music: Elmer Bernstein, Glen Campbell
Cast: John Wayne (Reuben J. "Rooster" Cogburn), Kim Darby (Mattie Ross), Glen Campbell (La Boeuf), Jeremy Slate (Emmett Quincy), Robert Duvall (Lucky Ned Pepper), **Dennis Hopper** (Moon), Strother Martin (Col. G. Stonehill), Jeff Corey (Tom Chaney)
35mm, color, 128 minutes

THE LAST MOVIE (1971)
Universal Pictures
Producer: Paul Lewis; Michael Gruskoff (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: **Dennis Hopper**, Stewart Stern
Cinematography: László Kovács
Production Design: Leon Ericksen
Editing: **Dennis Hopper**, David Berlatsky, Antranig Makakian
Music: Severn Darden, Chabuca Granda, Kris Kristofferson, John Buck Wilkin
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Kansas), Stella Garcia (Maria), Julie Adams (Mrs. Anderson), Tomás Milián(Priest), Don Gordon (Neville Robey), Roy Engel (Harry Anderson), Donna Baccala (Miss Anderson), Samuel Fuller (The American Director), Poupée Bocar (Nightclub Singer), Sylvia Miles (Script Clerk), Toni Basil (Rose), Peter Fonda (Young Sheriff), Henry Jaglom (Minister's Son), John Philip Law (Little Brother), Michelle Phillips (Banker's Daughter), Dean Stockwell (Billy the Kid)
35mm, color, 108 minutes

TRACKS (1976)
Trio
Producer: Howard Zucker; Ted Shapiro, Irving Cohen (co-producer); Elliot S. Blair (associate producer); Bert Schneider (executive producer)
Director: Henry Jaglom
Screenplay: Henry Jaglom
Cinematography: Paul Glickman
Art Direction: Bryan Ryman
Editing: George Folsey Jr.
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (1st Sgt. Jack Falen), Taryn Power (Stephanie), Dean Stockwell (Mark), Topo Swope (Chloe), Alfred Ryder (The Man), Zack Norman (Gene), Michael Emil (Emile), Barbara Flood (The Lady), Frank McRae (Train Coachman)
35mm, color, 92 minutes

THE AMERICAN FRIEND (1977)
Road Movies Filmproduktion / Wim Wenders Productions
Producer: Wim Wenders
Director: Wim Wenders
Screenplay: Wim Wenders, from the novel *Ripley's Game* by Patricia Highsmith
Cinematography: Robby Müller
Art Direction: Heidi Lüdi, Toni Lüdi
Editing: Peter Przygodda
Music: Jürgen Knieper
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Tom Ripley), Bruno Ganz (Jonathan Zimmermann), Lisa Kreuzer (Marianne Zimmermann), Gérard Blain (Raoul Minot), Nicholas Ray (Derwatt), Samuel Fuller (The American Mobster), David Blue (Allan Winter)
35mm, color, 127 minutes

APOCALYPSE NOW (1979)
American Zoetrope / United Artists
Producer: Francis Ford Coppola
Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Screenplay: Francis Ford Coppola, John Milius
Cinematography: Vittorio Storaro
Production Design: Dean Tavoularis
Editing: Richard Marks, Gerald B. Greenberg, Walter Murch, Lisa Fruchtman

Music: Carmine Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola
Cast: Martin Sheen (Benjamin L. Willard), Marlon Brando (Walter E. Kurtz), Frederic Forrest (Engineman 3rd Class Jay "Chef" Hicks), Sam Bottoms (Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Lance B. Johnson), Laurence Fishburne (Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Tyrone "Mr. Clean" Miller), Albert Hall (Chief Quartermaster George Phillips), Robert Duvall (Lieutenant Colonel William "Bill" Kilgore), **Dennis Hopper** (American Photojournalist), G. D. Spradlin (Lieutenant General Corman), Harrison Ford (Colonel Lucas), Scott Glenn (Captain Richard M. Colby)
35mm, color, 153 minutes (Redux version: 202 minutes)

OUT OF THE BLUE (1980)
Robson Street / Discovery Films
Producer: Gary Jules Jouvenat, Leonard Yakir; Paul Lewis, Aaron Sadovnick (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: Leonard Yakir, Brenda Nielson; Gary Jules Jouvenat, **Dennis Hopper** (uncredited)
Cinematography: Marc Champion
Production Design: Leon Ericksen
Editing: Doris Dyck
Music: Tom Lavin
Cast: Linda Manz (Cebe aka Cindy Barnes), **Dennis Hopper** (Don Barnes), Sharon Farrell (Kathy Barnes), Don Gordon (Charlie), Raymond Burr (Dr. Brean), Eric Allen (Paul)
35mm, color, 93 minutes

RUMBLE FISH (1983)
American Zoetrope / Universal Pictures
Producer: Fred Roos, Doug Claybourne; Roman Coppola, Gian-Carlo Coppola (associate producer); Francis Ford Coppola (executive producer)
Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Screenplay: Francis Ford Coppola, S. E. Hinton, from the novel by S. E. Hinton
Cinematography: Stephen H. Burum
Production Design: Dean Tavoularis
Editing: Barry Malkin
Music: Stewart Copeland

Cast: Matt Dillon (Rusty James), Mickey Rourke (the Motorcycle Boy), Diane Lane (Patty), **Dennis Hopper** (Father), Diana Scarwid (Cassandra), Vincent Spano (Steve), Nicolas Cage (Smokey), Chris Penn (B. J. Jackson), Laurence Fishburne (Midget), William Smith (Patterson the Cop), Glenn Withrow (Biff Wilcox), Tom Waits (Benny)
35mm, color, 94 minutes

THE OSTERMAN WEEKEND (1983)
20th Century Fox
Producer: Peter S. Davis, William L. Panzer; E. C. Monell, Don Guest (associate producer); Guy Collins, Larry Jones, Michael Timothy Murphy, Marc W. Zavat (executive producer)
Director: Sam Peckinpah
Screenplay: Ian Masters (adaptation), Alan Sharp (writer), from the novel by Robert Ludlum
Cinematography: John Coquillon
Art Direction: Robb Wilson King
Editing: Edward Abroms, David Rawlins
Music: Lalo Schiffrin
Cast: Rutger Hauer (John Tanner), John Hurt (Lawrence Fassett), **Dennis Hopper** (Richard Tremayne), Craig T. Nelson (Bernie Osterman), Meg Foster (Ali Tanner), Chris Sarandon (Joseph Cardone), Helen Shaver (Virginia Tremayne), Cassie Yates (Betty Cardone), Burt Lancaster (Maxwell Danforth)
35mm, color, 103 minutes

O.C. AND STIGGS (1985)
MGM
Producer: Robert Altman, Peter Newman; Scott Bushnell (associate producer); Lewis Allen (executive producer)
Director: Robert Altman
Screenplay: Ted Mann, Donald Cantrell, from the stories by Ted Mann and Tod Carroll
Cinematography: Pierre Mignot
Production Design: Scott Bushnell, David Gropman
Editing: Elizabeth Kling
Music: King Sunny Adé
Cast: Daniel H. Jenkins (Oliver Cromwell "O.C." Ogilvie), Neill Barry (Mark Stiggs), Jane Curtin (Elinore Schwab), Paul Dooley (Randall Schwab), Jon Cryer (Randall Schwab Jr.), Martin Mull (Pat Coletti),

**Dennis Hopper** (Sponson), Ray Walston (Grandpa "Gramps" Ogilvie), Louis Nye (Garth Sloan), Melvin Van Peebles (Wino Bob), Tina Louise (Florence Beaugereaux), Cynthia Nixon (Michelle)
35mm, color, 109 minutes

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 2 (1986)
Cannon Films / Cannon Film Distributors
Producer: Yoram Globus, Menahem Golan; Tobe Hooper (co-producer); L. M. Kit Carson (associate producer)
Director: Tobe Hooper
Screenplay: L. M. Kit Carson, from the characters by Tobe Hooper and Kim Henkel
Cinematography: Richard Kooris
Production Design: Cary White
Editing: Alain Jakubowicz
Music: Tobe Hooper, Jerry Lambert
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Texas Ranger "Lefty" Enright), Caroline Williams (Vanita "Stretch" Brock), Jim Siedow (Drayton Sawyer, the Cook), Bill Moseley ("Chop Top" Sawyer), Lou Perry (L. G. McPeters), Bill Johnson (Leatherface "Bubba" Sawyer), Barry Kinyon (Mercedes Driver), Christopher Douridas (Gunner), Kinky Friedman (Sports Anchorman)
35mm, color, 100 minutes

RIVER'S EDGE (1986)
Hemdale Film / Island Pictures
Producer: Sarah Pillbsury, Midge Sanford; David Streit (co-producer); John Daly, Derek Gibson (executive producer)
Director: Tim Hunter
Screenplay: Neal Jimenez
Cinematography: Frederick Elmes
Production Design: John Muto
Editing: Howard E. Smith, Sonya Sones
Music: Jürgen Knieper
Cast: Crispin Glover (Layne), Keanu Reeves (Matt), Ione Skye (Clarissa), Daniel Roebuck (Samson "John" Tollet), **Dennis Hopper** (Feck), Roxana Zal (Maggie), Joshua John Miller (Tim), Josh Richman (Tony), Phillip Brock (Mike), Tom Bower (Det. Bennett), Constance Forslund (Madeleine)
35mm, color, 99 minutes

BLUE VELVET (1986)
De Laurentiis Entertainment Group
Producer: Fred Caruso
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography: Frederick Elmes
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Editing: Duwayne Dunham
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Cast: Isabella Rossellini (Dorothy Vallens), Kyle Maclachlan (Jeffrey Beaumont), **Dennis Hopper** (Frank Booth), Laura Dern (Sandy Williams), Hope Lange (Mrs. Williams), Dean Stockwell (Ben), George Dickerson (Detective Williams), Priscilla Pointer (Mrs. Beaumont), Frances Bay (Aunt Barbara), Jack Harvey (Mr. Beaumont), Ken Stovitz (Mike), Brad Dourif (Raymond), Jack Nance (Paul)
35mm, color, 120 minutes

HOOSIERS (1986)
De Haven Productions, Hemdale Film Corporation / Orion Pictures
Producer: Carter DeHaven, Angelo Pizzo; Graham Henderson (associate producer); John Daly, Derek Gibson (executive producer)
Director: David Anspaugh
Screenplay: Angelo Pizzo
Cinematography: Fred Murphy
Production Design: David Nichols
Editing: Carroll Timothy O'Meara
Music: Jerry Goldsmith
Cast: Gene Hackman (Norman Dale), Barbara Hershey (Myra Fleener), **Dennis Hopper** (Shooter), Sheb Wooley (Cletus), Maris Valainis (Jimmy Chitwood), Brad Long (Buddy), Steve Hollar (Rade), David Neidorf (Everett), Kent Poole (Merle), Brad Boyle (Whit), Scott Summers (Strap), Wade Schenck (Ollie)
35mm, color, 115 minutes

THE BLACK WIDOW (1987)
20th Century Fox
Producer: Harold Schneider; Laurence Mark (executive producer)
Director: Bob Rafelson
Screenplay: Ronald Bass
Cinematography: Conrad L. Hall

Production Design: Gene Callahan
Editing: John Blossom
Music: Michael Small
Cast: Debra Winger (Alexandra Barnes), Theresa Russell (Catherine Petersen), Sami Frey (Paul Nuytten), **Dennis Hopper** (Ben Dumers), Nicol Williamson (William McCrory), Terry O'Quinn (Bruce, Alexandra's boss), James Hong (H. Shin), Diane Ladd (Etta)
35mm, color, 102 minutes

STRAIGHT TO HELL (1987)
J&M Entertainment / Island Pictures
Producer: Eric Fellner; Paul Raphael (associate producer); Cary Brokaw, Scott Mullaney (executive producer)
Director: Alex Cox
Screenplay: Alex Cox, Dick Rude
Cinematography: Tom Richmond
Production Design: Andrew McAlpine
Editing: David Martin
Music: Pray For Rain
Cast: Dick Rude (Willy), Sy Richardson (Norwood), Courtney Love (Velma), Joe Strummer (Simms), Miguel Sandoval (George), Shane MacGowan (Bruno McMahon), Spider Stacy (Angel Eyes McMahon), Kathy Burke (Sabrina), Elvis Costello (Hives the Butler), Edward Tudor-Pole (Rusty Zimmerman), **Dennis Hopper** (I. G. Farben), Grace Jones (Sonya), Jim Jarmusch (Amos Dade)
35mm, color, 86 minutes (Director's Cut: 91 minutes)

THE PICK-UP ARTIST (1987)
20th Century Fox
Producer: David L. MacLeod; Warren Beatty (executive producer)
Director: James Toback
Screenplay: James Toback
Cinematography: Gordon Willis
Production Design: Paul Sylbert
Editing: David Bretherton, Angelo Corrao
Music: Georges Delerue
Cast: Molly Ringwald (Randy Jensen), Robert Downey Jr. (Jack Jericho), **Dennis Hopper** (Flash Jensen), Danny Aiello (Phil Harper), Mildred Dunnock (Nellie), Harvey Keitel (Alonzo Scolara), Brian Hamill (Mike),

Tamara Bruno (Karen), Vanessa Williams (Rae, Girl with Dog)
35mm, color, 81 minutes

COLORS (1988)
Orion Pictures
Producer: Robert H. Solo; Paul Lewis (co-producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: Richard Di Lello, Michael Schiffer
Cinematography: Haskell Wexler
Production Design: Ron Foreman
Editing: Robert Estrin
Music: Herbie Hancock
Cast: Sean Penn (Officer Danny McGavin), Robert Duvall (Officer Bob Hodges), Maria Conchita Alonso (Louisa Gomez), Randy Brooks (Ron Delaney), Grand Bush (Larry Sylvester), Don Cheadle (Roccet), Gerardo Mejia (Bird), Glenn Plummer (Clarence "High Top" Brown), Sy Richardson (O.S.S. Sgt. Bailey), Damon Wayans (T-Bone), Leon Robinson (Killer Bee), Seymour Cassel (Officer Sullivan), Jack Nance (Officer Samuels)
35mm, color, 120 minutes (Director's Cut: 127 minutes)

CHATTAHOOCHEE (1989)
Hemdale Film Corporation
Producer: Aaron Schwab, Faye Schwab; Sue Baden-Powell (co-producer); John Daly, Derek Gibson (executive producer)
Director: Mick Jackson
Screenplay: James Hicks
Cinematography: Andrew Dunn
Production Design: Joseph T. Garrity
Editing: Don Fairservice
Music: John Keane
Cast: Gary Oldman (Emmett Foley), **Dennis Hopper** (Walker Benson), Frances McDormand (Mae Foley), Pamela Reed (Earlene), Ned Beatty (Dr. Harwood), M. Emmet Walsh (Morris), William De Acutis (Missy), Lee Wilkof (Vernon), Matt Craven (Lonny)
35mm, color, 97 minutes

FLASHBACK (1990)
Paramount Pictures
Producer: Marvin Worth; David Loughery (co-producer); Richard

Stenta (executive producer)
Director: Franco Amurri
Screenplay: David Loughery
Cinematography: Stefan Czapsky
Production Design: Vincent Cresciman
Editing: C. Timothy O'Meara
Music: Barry Goldberg
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Huey Walker), Kiefer Sutherland (John Buckner), Carol Kane (Maggie), Paul Dooley (Stark), Cliff De Young (Sheriff Hightower), Richard Masur (Barry), Michael McKean (Hal)
35mm, color, 107 minutes

CATCHFIRE (1990)
Vestron Pictures
Producer: Dick Clark, Dan Paulson; Lisa Demberg (co-producer); Steven Reuther, Mitchell Cannold (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper** (as Alan Smithee)
Screenplay: Rachel Kronstadt Mann, Ann Louise Bardach
Cinematography: Edward Lachman
Production Design: Ron Foreman
Editing: David Rawlins
Music: Michel Colombier
Cast: Jodie Foster (Anne Benton), **Dennis Hopper** (Milo), Dean Stockwell (John Luponi), Vincent Price (Mr. Avoca), John Turturro (Pinella), Fred Ward (Pauling), Julie Adams (Martha), Joe Pesci (Leo Carelli), Catherine Keener (Trucker's Girl), Charlie Sheen (Bob), Bob Dylan (Artist)
35mm, color, 98 minutes (TV Director's Cut: 116 minutes)

THE HOT SPOT (1990)
Orion Pictures
Producer: Paul Lewis; Deborah Capogrosso (co-producer); Valerie Tyson (associate producer); Stephen Ujlaki, Derek Power, Bill Gavin (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: Nona Tyson and Charles Williams, from the novel by Charles Williams
Cinematography: Ueli Steiger
Production Design: Cary White
Editing: Wendy Phifer Mate

Music: Jack Nitzsche
Cast: Don Johnson (Harry Madox), Virginia Madsen (Dolly Harshaw), Jennifer Connelly (Gloria Harper), Jerry Hardin (George Harshaw), William Sadler (Frank Sutton), Charles Martin Smith (Lon Gulick), Barry Corbin (Sheriff), Leon Rippy (Deputy Tate), Jack Nance (Julian Ward)
35mm, color, 130 minutes

PARIS TROUT (1991)
Palace Pictures
Producer: Frank Konigsberg, Larry Sanitsky; Diana Kerew (executive producer)
Director: Stephen Gyllenhaal
Screenplay: Peter Dexter, from his own novel
Cinematography: Robert Elswit
Production Design: Richard Sherman
Editing: Harvey Rosenstock
Music: David Shire
Cast: **Dennis Hopper** (Paris Trout), Babara Hershey (Hanna Trout), Ed Harris (Harry Seagraves), Ray McKinnon (Carl Bonner), Tina Lifford (Mary Sayers), Darnita Henry (Rosie Sayers), Eric Ware (Henry Ray Sayers), RonReaco Lee (Chester Sayers)
35mm, color, 100 minutes

THE INDIAN RUNNER (1991)
Columbia Pictures / MGM
Producer: Don Phillips; Patricia Morrison (co-producer); Stephen K. Bannon, Mark Bisgeier, Thom Mount (executive producer)
Director: Sean Penn
Screenplay: Sean Penn
Cinematography: Anthony B. Richmond
Production Design: Michael Haller
Editing: Jay Cassidy
Music: Jack Nitzsche
Cast: David Morse (Joe Roberts), Viggo Mortensen (Frank Roberts), Valeria Golino (Maria), Patricia Arquette (Dorothy), Charles Bronson (Mr. Roberts), Sandy Dennis (Mrs. Roberts), **Dennis Hopper** (Caesar), Jordan Rhodes (Randall), Enzo Rossi (Raffael), Harry Crews (Mr. Baker), Eileen Ryan (Mrs. Baker)
35mm, color, 127 minutes

BOILING POINT (1993)
Warner Bros.
Producer: Leonardo De La Fuente, Marc Frydman; Patrick Beaufront (co-producer); René Bonnell, Olivier Granier (executive producer)
Director: James B. Harris
Screenplay: James B. Harris, from the novel by Gerald Petievich
Cinematography: King Baggot
Production Design: Ron Foreman
Editing: Jerry Brady
Music: John D'Andrea, Cory Lerios
Cast: Wesley Snipes (Jimmy Mercer), **Dennis Hopper** (Rudolph "Red" Diamond), Lolita Davidovich (Vikki Dunbar), Viggo Mortensen (Ronnie), Seymour Cassel (Virgil Leach), Jonathan Banks (Max Waxman), Christine Elise (Carol), Tony Lo Bianco (Tony Dio), Valerie Perrine (Mona), James Tolkan (Levitt), Paul Gleason (Transaction Man), Lorraine Evanoff (Connie), Stephanie Williams (Sally Mercer), Tobin Bell (Roth)
35mm, color, 92 minutes

RED ROCK WEST (1993)
Roxie Releasing
Producer: Steve Golin, Sigurjón Sighvatsson; Lynn Weimer, Rick Dahl (associate producer); Michael Kuhn, Jane McGann (executive producer)
Director: John Dahl
Screenplay: John Dahl, Rick Dahl
Cinematography: Marc Reshovsky
Production Design: Robert Pearson
Editing: Scott Chestnut
Music: William Olvis
Cast: Nicolas Cage (Michael Williams), **Dennis Hopper** (Lyle from Dallas), Lara Flynn Boyle (Suzanne Brown/Ann McCord), J. T. Walsh (Wayne Brown/Kevin McCord), Dwight Yoakam (Truck Driver), Timothy Carhart (Deputy Matt Greytack), Robert Apel (Howard)
35mm, color, 98 minutes

TRUE ROMANCE (1993)
Morgan Creek Productions / Warner Bros.
Producer: Gary Barber, Samuel Hadida, Steve Perry, Bill Unger; Don

Edmonds, James W. Skotchdopole (co-producers); Gregory Manson, Spencer Franklin, Lisa Cogswell (associate producer); Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein, James G. Robinson (executive producer)
Director: Tony Scott
Screenplay: Quentin Tarantino
Cinematography: Jeffery L. Kimball
Production Design: Benjamín Fernández
Editing: Michael Tronick, Christian Wagner
Music: Hans Zimmer
Cast: Christian Slater (Clarence Worley), Patricia Arquette (Alabama Whitman), Michael Rapaport (Dick Ritchie), Bronson Pinchot (Elliot Blitzer), Saul Rubinek (Lee Donowitz), **Dennis Hopper** (Clifford Worley), James Gandolfini (Virgil), Gary Oldman (Drexl Spivey), Christopher Walken (Vincenzo Coccotti), Chris Penn (Nicky Dimes), Tom Sizemore (Cody Nicholson), Brad Pitt (Floyd), Val Kilmer (Elvis), Samuel L. Jackson (Big Don)
35mm, color, 121 minutes

CHASERS (1994)
Warner Bros.
Producer: James G. Robinson; David Wisnievitz (co-producer); Joe Batteer, John Rice (associate producer); Gary Barber (executive producer)
Director: **Dennis Hopper**
Screenplay: Joe Batteer, John Rice, Dan Gilroy
Cinematography: Ueli Steiger
Production Design: Robert Pearson
Editing: Christian Wagner
Music: Pete Anderson, Dwight Yoakam
Cast: Tom Berenger (Chief Petty Officer Rock Reilly), William McNamara (Yeoman 2nd Class Edward Devane), Erika Eleniak (Ensign Toni Johnson), Crispin Glover (Seaman Recruit Howard Finster), Matthew Glave (Rory Blanes), Grand L. Bush (Vance Dooly), Dean Stockwell (Salesman Stig), Bitty Schram (Flo, Waitress), Gary Busey (Sergeant Vince Banger), Seymour Cassel (Master Chief Seymie Bogg), Frederic Forrest (Duane, Mechanic), Marilu Henner (Katie, Waitress), **Dennis Hopper** (Doggie)
35mm, color, 102 minutes

SPEED (1994)
20th Century Fox
Producer: Mark Gordon; Allison Lyon (co-producer); Ian Bryce (executive producer)
Director: Jan De Bont
Screenplay: Graham Yost
Cinematography: Andrzej Bartkowiak
Production Design: Jackson De Govia
Editing: John Wright
Music: Mark Mancina
Cast: Keanu Reeves (Officer Jack Traven), **Dennis Hopper** (Howard Payne), Sandra Bullock (Annie Porter), Jeff Daniels (Detective Harry Temple), Joe Morton (Lieutenant McMahon), Richard Lineback (Sergeant Norwood), Alan Ruck (Doug Stephens), Hawthorne James (Sam), Beth Grant (Helen)
35mm, color, 116 minutes

WATERWORLD (1995)
Davis Entertainment / Universal Pictures
Producer: Kevin Costner, John Davis, Charles Gordon, Lawrence Gordon; David Fulton (associate producer); Ilona Herzberg, Andrew Licht, Jeffrey Mauer (executive producer)
Director: Kevin Reynolds
Screenplay: Peter Rader, David Twohy
Cinematography: Dean Semler
Production Design: Dennis Gassner
Editing: Peter Boyle
Music: James Newton Howard
Cast: Kevin Costner (The Mariner), **Dennis Hopper** (The Deacon), Jeanne Tripplehorn (Helen), Tina Majorino (Enola), Michael Jeter (Old Gregor), Gerard Murphy (The Nord), R. D. Call (Enforcer at the Atoll), Jack Black (Smoker Plane Pilot)
35mm, color, 135 minutes

BASQUIAT (1996)
Miramax Films
Producer: Jon Kilik, Randy Ostrow, Sigurjon Sighvatsson; Peter Brant, Joseph Allen, Michiyo Yoshizaki (executive producer)
Director: Julian Schnabel

Screenplay: Julian Schnabel; Lech J. Majewski (story); John Bowe (short story)
Cinematography: Ron Fortunato
Production Design: Dan Leigh
Editing: Michael Berenbaum
Music: Julian Schnabel, John Cale
Cast: Jeffrey Wright (Jean-Michel Basquiat), David Bowie (Andy Warhol), Benicio del Toro (Benny Dalmau), Gary Oldman (Albert Milo), Michael Wincott (Rene Ricard), Claire Forlani (Gina Cardinale), **Dennis Hopper** (Bruno Bischofberger), Tatum O'Neal (Cynthia Kruger), Courtney Love (Big Pink), Christopher Walken (The Interviewer), Willem Dafoe (The Electrician), Parker Posey (Mary Boone)
35mm, color, 108 minutes

THE BLACKOUT (1997)
MDP Worldwide / Trimark Pictures
Producer: Edward R. Pressman, Clayton Townsend; Michel Chambat, Pierre Kalfon (co-producer); Jay Cannold (associate producer); Alessandro Camon, Mark Damon (executive producer)
Director: Abel Ferrara
Screenplay: Abel Ferrara, Marla Hanson, Christ Zois
Cinematography: Ken Kelsch
Production Design: Richard Hoover
Editing: Jim Mol
Music: Joe Delia
Cast: Matthew Modine (Matty), Claudia Schiffer (Susan), Béatrice Dalle (Annie 1), Sarah Lassez (Annie 2), **Dennis Hopper** (Mickey Wayne), Steven Bauer (Mickey's Studio Actor), Laura Bailey (Mickey's Studio Actress), Nancy Ferrara (Mickey's Studio Actress), Andrew Fiscella (Mickey's Studio Actor), Vincent Lamberti (Mickey's Studio Actor)
35mm, color, 98 minutes

EDTV (1999)
Universal Pictures
Producer: Ron Howard, Brian Grazer, Jeffrey T. Barabe; Aldric La'auli Porter, Louisa Velis (associate producer); Michel Roy, Richard Sadler, Todd Hallowell (executive producer)
Director: Ron Howard
Screenplay: Lowell Ganz, Babaloo Mandel from screenplay by Sylvie

Bouchard and Émile Gaudreault
Cinematography: John Schwartzman
Production Design: Michael Corenblith
Editing: Daniel P. Hanley, Mike Hill
Music: Randy Edelman
Cast: Matthew McConaughey (Edward "Ed" Pekurny), Jenna Elfman (Shari), Woody Harrelson (Raymond "Ray" Pekurny), Sally Kirkland (Jeanette), Martin Landau (Al), Ellen DeGeneres (Cynthia), Rob Reiner (Mr. Whitaker), **Dennis Hopper** (Henry "Hank" Pekurny), Elizabeth Hurley (Jill), Adam Goldberg (John)
35mm, color, 122 minutes

JESUS' SON (1999)
Jesus' Son Productions / Lions Gate Entertainment
Producer: Elizabeth Cuthrell, Lydia Dean Pilcher, David Urrutia; Margot Bridger (co-producer); Oren Moverman (associate producer); Steven Tuttleman (executive producer)
Director: Allison Maclean
Screenplay: Elizabeth Cuthrell, David Urrutia, Oren Moverman, from the book by Denis Johnson
Cinematography: Adam Kimmel
Production Design: David Doernberg
Editing: Stuart Levy, Geraldine Peroni
Music: Joe Henry
Cast: Billy Crudup (FH), Samantha Morton (Michelle), Denis Leary (Wayne), Holly Hunter (Mira), **Dennis Hopper** (Bill), Jack Black (Georgie), Will Patton (John Smith), Michael Shannon (Dundun), Mark Webber (Jack Hotel), Greg Germann (Dr. Shanis), Denis Johnson (Terrance Weber)
35mm, color, 107 minutes

KNOCKAROUND GUYS (2001)
Lawrence Bender Productions / New Line Cinema
Producer: Lawrence Bender, Brian Koppelman, David Levien; Julie Kirkham (co-producer); Michael DeLuca, Brian Witten, Stan Wlodowski (executive producer)
Director: Brian Koppelman, David Levien
Screenplay: Brian Koppelman, David Levien
Cinematography: Tom Richmond

Production Design: Lester Cohen
Editing: David Moritz
Music: Clint Mansell
Cast: Barry Pepper (Matty Demaret), Andrew Davoli (Chris Scarpa), Seth Green (Johnny Marbles), Vin Diesel (Taylor Reese), John Malkovich (Teddy Deserve), Arthur Nascarella (Billy Clueless), Tom Noonan (Sheriff Stan Decker), Nicholas Pasco (Freddy the Watch), Shawn Doyle (Deputy Sheriff Donny Ward), Kevin Gage (Gordon Brucker), **Dennis Hopper** (Benny "Chains" Demaret)
35mm, color, 92 minutes

LAND OF THE DEAD (2005)
Atmosphere Entertainment MM / Universal Pictures
Producer: Mark Canton, Bernie Goldman, Peter Grunwald; Neil Canton (co-producer); David Resnick, Silenn Thomas (associate producer); Steve Barnett, Dennis E. Jones, Ryan Kavanaugh, Lynwood Spinks (executive producer)
Director: George A. Romero
Screenplay: George A. Romero
Cinematography: Miroslaw Baszak
Production Design: Arv Grewal
Editing: Michael Doherty
Music: Reinhold Heil, Johnny Klimek
Cast: Simon Baker (Riley Denbo), **Dennis Hopper** (Paul Kaufman), John Leguizamo (Cholo DeMora), Asia Argento (Slack), Robert Joy (Charlie Houk), Eugene Clark (Big Daddy), Joanne Boland (Pretty Boy), Tony Nappo (Foxy), Maxwell McCabe-Lokos (Mouse), Tony Munch (Anchor), Shawn Roberts (Mike), Krista Bridges (Motown), Pedro Miguel Arce (Pillsbury), Simon Pegg (Photo Booth Zombie), Edgar Wright (Photo Booth Zombie)
35mm, color, 93 minutes (Director's cut: 97 minutes)

ELEGY (2008)
Samuel Goldwyn Films
Producer: Tom Rosenberg, Gary Lucchesi, Andre Lamal; Judd Malkin, Terry McKay, Eric Reid, Richard Wright (executive producer)
Director: Isabel Coixet
Screenplay: Nicholas Meyer, from the novel by Philip Roth
Cinematography: Jean-Claude Larrieu

Production Design: Claude Paré
Editing: Amy Duddleston
Cast: Ben Kingsley (David Kepesh), Penélope Cruz (Consuela Castillo), **Dennis Hopper** (George O'Hearn), Peter Sarsgaard (Kenneth Kepesh), Patricia Clarkson (Carolyn), Deborah Harry (Amy O'Hearn), Charlie Rose (Himself)
35mm, color, 108 minutes

PALERMO SHOOTING (2008)
Neue Road Movies
Producer: Gian-Piero Ringel, Wim Wenders; Felix Eisele, Stephen Mallmann (associate producer); Peter Schwartzkopff, Jeremy Thomas (executive producer)
Director: Wim Wenders
Screenplay: Wim Wenders, Norman Ohler, Bernd Lange
Cinematography: Franz Lustig
Production Design: Sebastian Soukup
Editing: Peter Przygodda, Oli Weiss
Music: Irmin Schmidt
Cast: Campino (Finn), Inga Busch (Karla), Axel Sichrovsky (Hans), Gerhard Gutberlet (Gerhard), Harry Blain (Harry), Sebastian Blomberg (Julian), Jana Pallaske (Student), Olivia Asiedu-Poku (Fan), Melika Foroutan (Anke), Anna Orso (Mother), Lou Reed (Himself), **Dennis Hopper** (Frank)
35mm, color, 124 minutes (Re-cut version: 108 minutes)

ALPHA AND OMEGA (2010)
Crest Animation Productions / Lionsgate
Producer: Ken Katsumoto, Steve Moore, Richard Rich; Timothy Yoo (associate producer); Noah Fogelson, A. K. Madhavan, Michael Paseornek, Seemha Ramanna (executive producer)
Director: Anthony Bell, Ben Gluck
Screenplay: Chris Denk, Steve Moore
Editing: Scott Anderson
Music: Chris P. Bacon
Cast: Justin Long (Humphrey), Hayden Panettiere (Kate), **Dennis Hopper** (Tony), Danny Glover (Winston), Larry Miller (Marcel), Eric Price (Paddy), Vicki Lewis (Eve), Chris Carmack (Garth), Christina Ricci (Lilly)
35mm, color, 88 minutes

# Dennis Hopper: Interviews

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# No Margin for Error

*Photoplay*/1957

From *Photoplay*, May 1957.

"In this business," Dennis Hopper says seriously, "there's no margin for error. You have to grow up all of a sudden." Even at the rate Dennis has moved, he has. Only twenty, the blond newcomer is being cheered for his work as Rock Hudson's son in *Giant*. Yet Dennis once seemed a kid with his head in the clouds. He was the eager movie fan, haunting Saturday matinees back home in Dodge City, Kansas. Hardly into his teens, he began acting in school plays, won contests by declaiming scenes from Shakespeare and O'Neill. "My parents thought I was going to grow up to be a bum," he grins, "writing poetry and stuff like that." They accused him of a tendency to laziness.

But it wasn't a lazy life that Dennis had in mind. The summer he was seventeen, he proved that by slaving as a twenty-five-dollar-a-week apprentice at La Jolla Playhouse in California, sometimes going sleepless for forty-eight hours at a stretch. The next year, La Jolla's John Swope suggested that Dennis try his luck with movies or TV. The boy was game, if not exactly bursting with self-confidence. "When I arrived in Hollywood, "he says, "I had the bad luck to see Bel Air first. I looked at all those big houses, and I thought, 'I'll never make it!'"

He made it—and in short order. Inside two months, he scored a dramatic hit on TV that brought him a Warners' contract. He did a small role in *I Died a Thousand Times*, a better one in *Rebel Without a Cause*, then *Giant*. Next are Paramount's big *Gunfight at the OK Corral* and Warners' *The Story of Mankind*.

Dennis hasn't built up to a Bel Air mansion yet: he's perfectly content with a one-room apartment. "I go on kicks," he says. "I'll shut myself up there for a while, reading or painting." But he's no solitary; he has formed friendships with other young players, as earnest and career-

conscious as he is. There's Susan Kohner, fellow apprentice of La Jolla Days. He met Nick Adams while making *Rebel*, Natalie Wood before that, while testing for the picture. Dennis and Nat dated for a time, are now just friends.

Nat, too, has grown up in a rush, as Dennis says teenagers must in show business. "When I went back to Kansas for my grandparents' fiftieth wedding anniversary," he recalls, "I was shocked to learn that all the friends I had gone to school with were married and had children. I was so occupied with movie work that this part of life had passed me by.

"I sometimes wonder if I'll ever be ready to get married. I'm so intensely involved with my career that I'm irresponsible where everything else is concerned."

# Rebel from Dodge City

Jane Wilkie/1957

From *Modern Screen*, May 1957.

Fifteen years ago this summer, the body of a famous movie cowboy was transported from California to the East, and as the train sped across the shimmering Kansas plains, the actor received a final, unknown tribute from a very small boy. Standing in his grandfather's wheat field, no taller than the young grain itself, the tow-headed youngster waved frantically as the train passed, and kept waving until long after the thin black line was out of sight.

To Dennis Hopper, age five, death meant very little. All he knew was that his beloved cowboy, dearer to him than anyone in the whole world, was to be on that mid-day train. He had been stationed in the wheat field for an hour, had even dared to ignore the call for lunch, to make certain he would not miss the experience. For this was the nearest Dennis had ever been to an actor.

Actors were important to him. Each Saturday, when his parents drove into town in the jeep to buy the week's groceries, Dennis was deposited at the local movie theatre and left to revel in the deeds of daring he witnessed on the screen. There were two theatres in Dodge City, and Dennis necessarily went to the cheaper one. Plots mattered nothing to him and he was too young to appreciate the art of acting; it was the world of make-believe that he loved, and in his young eyes all actors were great heroes.

Dennis was an only child, the farm was six miles from Dodge City, and the nearest neighbor was five miles in the opposite direction. In all his very young life he had no one to play with, and the longest days on the farm were spent in the companionship of animals. There was Porcupine, the pig he had raised himself and given special care, the goose, and Puddles the dog. When he tired of the one-sided conversations, the boy

threw himself into his favorite game *I pretend*. By turns he was a soldier, a cowboy, a knight, a king, and whatever the character he pretended to be, he was always a hero, loved and acclaimed by those who surrounded him.

Today Dennis Hopper still plays the same game, for much the same reasons. He is an actor in his own right, and although he never had any dramatic training, he has the world of the theatre by the tail. His first professional stint, the role of an epileptic on TV's *Medic*, brought him offers from four studios. Dennis signed with Warner Bros., specifically because he knew that there he had a chance at the role of Jordan Benedict III in *Giant*. He got it, through the faith of director George Stevens. "I called him in to read for the part," says Stevens, "and for some [reason] I knew he could do it, so I told him I believed in him and would give him five minutes to decide if he could do the part. He went outside and when he came back he looked at me and said, 'I can do it.' I think his performance proves my belief in his talent. Dennis is an instinctive actor. He'll go far."

### Pleased but Frightened

Dennis was eighteen when he began work in *Giant* and two years later he stood in the lobby of New York's Roxy Theatre, following the premiere of the film and was mobbed by fans. To Dennis it was a pleasing yet frightening experience, particularly when a girl in the crowd screamed, "I've got to touch him!" It stunned him, this sudden fame. Up to that point he hadn't thought anyone knew he was alive, then suddenly there was this hysteria swirling around him. He was pleased because it meant he had proved himself and he was frightened because he is shy and uncomfortable in crowds.

His early years made him shy and lonely. His parents lived in Dodge City, his father working at the grocery store and his mother running the town's swimming pool, and Dennis grew up with the companionship only of his grandparents and the farm animals. He longed to see a mountain, to see a skyscraper. The Saturday movies became for him the time of escape from existence into life. He was seven when his brother David was born, but David was born too late to be a pal. When Dennis began school he walked the long miles alone to Dodge City, except in bad weather when his grandfather drove him to town in the pick-up truck. The other kids called him Clodhopper, and taunted him for his shyness. He became more and more withdrawn, and vividly remembers the day he tried to make conversation with a teacher. She was painting a chair as he entered the classroom, and in a painful effort at sociability he asked,

"What are you doing—painting a chair?" The teacher laughed. "Isn't that smart of Dennis?" she said to the class. "He thinks I'm painting a chair." Even today when he thinks of it, he squints as though suffering. "I hated that teacher," he says. "I don't think any kid had a bad day as that one was to me." It was things like this, small things that would roll off the back of a less sensitive boy, that turned Dennis into a rebel.

### Sudden Changes

When he was twelve the family moved to Kansas City, where his father went to work for the Railway Express and they lived in what Dennis refers to as "a beat-up house in the tenement district." Streets and alleys swarmed with kids, with adults, even with trash. Dennis's grandfather, visiting Kansas City, looked at the teaming masses and littered streets and said, "Seems like everybody's behind in their haulin'."

As for Dennis, he was bug-eyed. He had never known there were so many people in the world. Because he had been so lonely, this sudden entrance into a life filled with humanity, in Kansas City, showed him for the first time real human emotions rather than just movie plots; and he began forming his own ideas. At school he bucked authority, was caught smoking in the halls, argued with teachers because he refused to accept anyone else's ideas, and more than once was asked to leave school.

Two years later the family moved again, this time to San Diego. Here, at fourteen, Dennis mulled over the ways in which he might prove himself to other people. He began to want, more than anything, to be accepted, to find a field in which he could excel. For a while he thought about becoming an artist, and painted pastels at the Nelson Art Gallery. He tried writing poetry, and at the same time played third base on the school baseball team. He boxed in Golden Glove tournaments and went out for football too; but he realized his best field would be one in which he could express himself. Finally, he thought about acting. He became active in the school speech contests, won them all, and ended up winning California's State Declamation contests three years in a row. He had found his work; he'd be an actor.

### A Mind of His Own

His family disapproved. All this talk about acting and poetry and painting; these things would never bring in any money. They thought, and they told him, that he was going to turn into a bum. He disregarded what they said, and continued disregarding his teachers' opinions as well. He refused to read books, to go to class, to study, to join organizations, and

was again kicked out of school for arguing with the staff. The other kids at school were impressed. Dennis, they said, was a leader; he would never follow anyone. They began calling him the Conqueror, and eventually, Napoleon, a name which stuck throughout school. His report cards were splattered with D's and F's, yet his classmates voted him as the student most likely to succeed after he graduated.

"It was pretty crazy," Dennis says now. "I remember Mr. Page—he had charge of the school annual—and he kept asking me if I thought I would graduate. My grades were so bad, and yet the kids had decided I was most likely to succeed, and poor old Page didn't know whether or not to put my picture in the annual."

**Some Day . . .**

In the meantime, he was wetting his feet in the world of theatre. For twenty-five dollars a week he worked backstage at the nearby La Jolla Playhouse, where he painted scenery, played records, pulled curtains, drove the station wagon to pick up Hollywood's famous stars at the airport, "And," he grins, "latrine duty." Having decided to become an actor, Dennis was deeply impressed by the big-name stars with whom he came in contact, but his individuality, his personal pride, didn't buckle under. One morning he was sleeping in the theatre having worked all night to tear down scenery for a last-minute change, and had been asleep only one hour when a voice bellowed through the empty theatre. Dennis opened one eye to see Jose Ferrer, "give me a dime." Up to this point Dennis had worshipped Ferrer from afar, considering him the zenith of actors, producers, and directors. But suddenly he was very annoyed.

"I make twenty-five dollars a week," he said stiffly. "I don't have a dime."

Ferrer apologized. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't realize. I only wanted a dime to make a phone call." He gave Dennis five dollars and left, and Dennis thought, "Some day I'll be an actor, too."

It wasn't long in coming. On the strength of his victories in the state speech contests, he was given the role of Lorenzo in San Diego's National Shakespearean Festival presentation of *Merchant of Venice*—and was the only high school boy ever to play in the Festival, which ordinarily requires two years of college from its actors. Dorothy McGuire and her husband John Swope saw him in this and arranged an introduction to a Hollywood casting director, Ruth Birch. Miss Birch got him a part—ten lines worth—in a TV production of *Cavalcade of America*, and from this came his first really professional job—the epileptic boy on *Medic*. This

led to the Warner Bros. contract, and the coveted part as Rock Hudson's doctor son in *Giant*.

Without training, Dennis gave a magnificent performance. Yet he is aware, now more than ever before, how much he has to learn.

#### Dennis and Females

Today he lives alone in a second-floor apartment—"a one-room job and a bath with a marble shower." He says he's happiest when he's in the shower.

His most frequent date has been Natalie Wood, with whom he admits he can't get along. "Can't get along!" explodes Nick Adams, Dennis's closest friend. "Those two fight like cats and dogs. I spend all my time patching them up!"

According to Dennis, the rifts are his own fault. "We can't get along because I can't be a follower. I have to lead. I have my own thoughts and I can't agree with hers. Besides—maybe all females are that way—but Natalie blows hot and cold. She's inconsistent and it confuses me."

Insofar as "females" are concerned, Dennis figures he'll probably marry some day. "But I won't be easy to live with. I go off on strange tangents. Why, I might not even come home for three days. It wouldn't be fair to a girl to have to live with me—I'm still too involved with myself. Besides, I can't get along with people too well. Sometimes I try, sometimes I don't care!"

#### A New Napoleon

His next role delights him. He will play Napoleon in *The Story of Mankind*. In San Diego's Community Theatre there hangs a portrait of Napoleon, underneath which is a copy of his famous tri-cornered hat. One day Dennis put it on, and those present sucked in their breath. Except for his blond hair, he was the living image of the conqueror. So there is a double reason Dennis has always wanted to portray Napoleon. He not only resembles him physically; he has great admiration for the man and feels he is very like him.

By now, Dennis has his family's approval, as well as that of professional actors. Says Rock Hudson, with whom Dennis had most of his important scenes in *Giant*, "Dennis has great potential as an actor. He has a natural talent that is rare, and he'll go places."

So, for Dennis Hopper, the world is a rosy one. He has seen his mountains and his skyscrapers, and he has lost himself in a world of make-believe, only to find himself. For the Little Corporal, the stage is set.

# Spotlight!: The Hollywood Scene

*Seventeen*/1969

From *Seventeen*, October 1969. Reprinted by permission of Hearst Magazines.

"I've always wanted to be a director," Dennis Hopper declares, "ever since I walked onto a set when I was eighteen and realized that an actor couldn't fulfill himself on film, that the director had complete creative control. But until *Easy Rider*, I didn't have the chance." Dennis was wearing a double-breasted striped suit, elephant-hide boots, a battered cowboy hat over brown hair falling to his shoulders. He is thirty-four now, and his face is gaunt. "It's really hard to raise the money for a project in Hollywood. The film distributors have you in their grip, and a lot of those people don't know how to evaluate material. The only way you can get them involved is through a name they think is commercial.

"One of the things that has bothered me for a long time is the violence in films. I feel very strongly about violence. I don't mind sex. If someone wants to watch a sexy scene in a movie, that's his business. There's nothing there that everyone isn't familiar with from his own life. But I've been aware for years how violence on screen affects people. I remember after we made *Rebel Without a Cause*, there were hundreds of reports about cars with slashed tires in the places where the movie had played, areas in which they had never had slashed tires before. In high school after we saw Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, we were all dressing in black leather jackets. When I was a kid on the wheat farm, I used to live for Saturday afternoons at the movies. I'd see a war movie, then the whole next week I'd pretend I was digging foxholes while doing chores on the farm, or I'd take a whack at a cow's backside with a stick, pretending it was a sword. All our lives we've been shaped by movies. We watch the Bogarts and the Cagneys and see criminals made heroes and identify with them and have our principles shaped by them. The people who have made these movies have never taken the responsibility

for what they've done to us. They're only concerned with the dollar. If it sells, they'll make it, and that's as far as their morality goes.

"I have spent the last two years of my life on *Easy Rider*, working on the script, directing it, editing it for eight or nine months after it was shot. Because of that film, my marriage broke up. My wife didn't think I could bring it off. I made it at a time when I felt America was burning. It's a picture that shows the violence underneath everything. It shows how we talk freedom and democracy but refuse to recognize that we are a herd animal, and that we can't bear anyone different from ourselves to come around. It might be a different way of dress, it might be long hair, it might be different ideas; whatever it is, the herd says, destroy outsiders. I think if we recognize that, we can try and fight against it and develop tolerance."

# *Easy Rider*: A Very American Thing

L. M. Kit Carson/1969

From *Evergreen*, November 1969. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Dennis Hopper, coauthor, director, and costar of the Columbia film *Easy Rider*, was interviewed by L. M. Kit Carson immediately after the first press screening in New York City last summer. The following is an edited transcript of that conversation.

**Question:** How did this film start? With what? With whom?
**Answer:** It started with Peter [Fonda] calling me on the telephone, saying he had an idea for a movie about two guys who smuggle cocaine, sell it, go across the country for Mardi Gras, and get killed by a couple of duck hunters because they have long hair. "Do you think it can make a movie?" And I said, "Yeh. I think it can make a great movie."

**Q:** At what point did Terry Southern come into it?
**A:** Terry Southern was an old friend of mine. I asked if we could use his name to get money; then, would he help us with it. He said, "Sure, I like the idea." So we got some cameras and people together, ran down and shot Mardi Gras first; then began the rest of the movie a month later.

**Q:** Why'd you shoot on a split and backwards schedule like that?
**A:** We wanted to use the real Mardi Gras and scheduled to shoot it. But Peter had gotten the wrong dates for Mardi Gras—we thought it was a month away. Suddenly we learned it was a week away. So we shot Mardi Gras without a script, without anything—with just what I had in my mind. I knew generally what I wanted the acid trip to be, and what I wanted from Mardi Gras.

**Q:** How many days did it take to shoot Mardi Gras?

**A:** We had five days at Mardi Gras. The acid trip was shot on two different days—half of one day, the whole of another day. This was fast, but I'd learned to squeeze, learned to work fast from television—how to move quickly and utilize your time.

**Q:** Did you do anything to the Mardi Gras film stock? Some sections seem to be off-tone, or in high contrast.
**A:** Some of that footage has stains on it, but those were stains that came on the film. And one day it was raining and another day not—so, different light. But I believe what Cocteau said: "Ninety-eight percent of all creation is accident, one percent intellect, and one percent logic." I believe that you must keep *free* for things to happen, for the accident—and then learn how to use the accident.

**Q:** Were you satisfied with the acid trip footage?
**A:** Yeh. But everyone else was confused. It was a mess at Mardi Gras. I took over the camera myself at one point. Fifteen men threatened to walk out. It was a classic mess. And there was this great question then whether I would go on directing the movie after that. Nobody understood what the hell I'd shot in 16mm. Everybody was asking, "Well, what is the acid trip sequence like?" So I held back from editing that footage until the last, saying**:** "Nobody'll be able to unravel this part of the film but me, so they can't finish the film without me." We shot as much film at Mardi Gras as we shot for the whole rest of the movie.

**Q:** And this Mardi Gras footage convinced Columbia to give you the money for the movie?
**A:** No, we had the money before. Got the money from a very complete story outline which we had dialogued with a tape recorder. Then after Mardi Gras, I drove back across country to California from New Orleans, spotting locations for the other sequences along the way. Then I came to New York. Peter was here with Terry, and we sat down and wrote the script in two weeks because I needed at least a week and a half to complete casting. Then we started shooting. I wanted the pressure kept up like this because the quicker we worked, the more it rushed Columbia. We moved so fast at the beginning that the studio couldn't absorb everything that was going on; it was hard for them to question us when they couldn't even keep track. And this worked. Finally the studio just sort of had to lay back and let go.

See, I believe that if you're going to do something you have to learn

how to protect yourself. "You should protect yourself from the braggarts because they'll find the advantage which you expect, and they will find that advantage. Take an example from what will happen to me."—The Gospel According to St. Thomas, found in 1946, printed in 1959, which a lot of the picture is based upon. This was Doubting Thomas's *Sayings of Christ*. A lot of the acid trip was based on it: Peter talking to his mother, telling her how much he hates her—it says in St. Thomas: "If you do not hate your mother and father in the same way I hate mine, you shall not be worthy of being a disciple." Now I take that doctrine as evolution: wanting to one-up your father, your mother. And, in a strange way, you have to resent them to go on. Most people don't resent their mother and father, and they fall in the same traps, like Jack in the movie—he can't get out from under them, he can't evolve. Thomas's Christ also says: "I only ask one thing: don't lie and don't do what you hate." That's the only moral judgment he sets up. He says, "If you want to kill a powerful man, just take the sword in your hand and thrust it through the wall of your house to see if you have the thrust. If you do, then go and slay him." It's a very revolutionary, *evolutionary*—which I like better—evolutionary document. It talks about how things *go on*, continue.

**Q:** You shot in Los Angeles first after New Orleans?
**A:** We were in Los Angeles for three weeks. We shot the commune, which was the only set we built, up on Topanga Canyon outside the city. Then shot the interior of the whorehouse—which is really the inside of a friend's home. Then we shot four weeks cross-country. Whole movie: seven weeks including a week at Mardi Gras.

**Q:** Elaborate on the way you handled the non-actors in the Southern cafe scene. It looked to me like the people in the booths had script-cards on the table in front of them—they would refer to the cards, then look up and speak a line.
**A:** Yeh, well, they weren't. They kept looking down because they were supposed to be playing dominoes. I never gave them the script. How I worked them? First of all, there was a man who preceded us into towns like that and got together people he thought would be right for the roles. I came into one village—Morganza, Louisiana—and looked at the people he'd chosen. I didn't care for them. And I saw a group of men standing over beside us doing the kind of joking that the guys in the café were to do. I said, "*Those* are the people I want." He said, "Well I don't know whether I can get them." And I said, "Those are the people I want." So

he went over and asked them, and to his surprise they were more than happy to do it. Then I told these men that we had raped, killed a girl right outside of town; and there was nothing they could say about us in this scene that would be too nasty—I mean, they could say *anything* they wanted about us. (And they were pretty set in this frame of mind anyway.) All right. Then I gave them specific topics, things that were covered in the script: talk about long hair, is-it-a-boy-is-it-a-girl, the teeth I'm wearing around my neck, or Peter's black leather pants, or the sunglasses. Then I set up the camera in such a way that I could stop them: "Don't say that"; and isolate: "You say something about this." And the girls: I got them to flirting with one idea—they wanted a ride on the motorcycle. Because I wanted to get them outside. And because this flirting would aggravate the guys even more. So at first I just let them go at it, work their real feelings out. After watching a bit of this, I gave some definite lines: "Check the flag on that bike. Must be a bunch of Yankee queers." "You name it, I'll throw rocks at it." Those were lines from the script. But basically the scene, improvised and all, plays according to the *intention* of the café scene written in the script.

**Q:** How long did this scene take to shoot?
**A:** We shot it in half a day.

**Q:** In regard to those café people: do you feel guilty of any indecency done to them?
**A:** Do I feel that because of this film there's harm done to them personally?

**Q:** Do you feel you violated them in any way?
**A:** No, I don't believe that—well, you've got to understand that I believe that anything that is a creative act can be justified.

**Q:** Murder included?
**A:** Well, not quite that far, but almost. I don't know whether I violated them. But then we all violate. Still, there's an area in me where I hope I didn't hurt them because I happen to like those people. I didn't mean them any harm.

On the other hand, I know that if I'd come in there actually traveling across country alone, or if me, Peter, and Jack Nicholson had walked into that restaurant without a movie company behind us and those men had been sitting in there, we'd have been in a lot of trouble.

That's true—I know. I was in the Civil Rights March with King from Selma to Montgomery—it was crazy. There was one guy standing on the side of the road pissing on us. I mean, there he was with his cock in his hand pissing on nuns and priests, all over. And he was calling us white trash. Pissing on nuns and priests and rabbis and Protestants and all religious people in their uniforms, and on us—and calling us white trash. Crazy, you know: how can a man be pissing on people and calling *them* white trash? It doesn't make sense.

And I know that this time the only thing that stopped trouble was the fact that we were making a movie. And suddenly I could relate to these people as their director and they could relate to me.

**Q:** Do you connect yourself to any actively political people today?
**A:** I don't think anyone intelligent connects himself to anyone political today. The last time I mixed with politics was when I got kicked out of a SNCC meeting in the South because they were going into black power, and all the whites had to get out. Which was all right; they were right. They were going to take care of their people, and we should take care of our people—because our people were in just as much a mess as their people. Unfortunately, it's harder to take care of whites because a great mass of them don't think we have any real problems. When SDS went out to Newark a couple of years ago to the poor whites, the people said: "What are you trying to help us for? We're cool." And at the moment I don't think there's going to be any serious change in this attitude—most of us think, "I'm cool. *He*'s the trouble." Until we have some sort of war. It'll have to be some kind of war because a lot of things need changing.

I think the movie says this—I mean, it creates this dangerous atmosphere. I know when we were making the movie, we could feel this: the whole country seemed to be burning up—Negroes, hippies, students. The country was on fire. And I meant to work this feeling into the symbols in the movie, like Peter's bike—Captain America's Great Chrome Bike—that beautiful machine covered with stars and stripes is America. I'm not sure that people understand but that bike with all the money in the gas tank is America and we've got all our money in a gas tank—and that any moment we can be shot off it—BOOM—explosion—that's the end. We go up in flames. I mean, at the start of the movie, Peter and I do a very American thing—we commit a crime, we go for the easy money. We go for the easy money and then we're free. That's one of the big problems with the country right now: everybody's going for the easy money. I think Americans basically feel the criminal way is all right *if you don't*

*get caught*; crime pays, *if* you get away with it. Not just obvious, simple crimes, but big corporations committing corporate crimes—swindling on their income tax, freezing funds abroad.

**Q:** Are you saying that Peter in the movie represents America?
**A:** Yeh. But more than that. Me and Peter are the Squire and his Knight, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, also Billy the Kid and Wyatt Earp, *also* Captain America, the comic book hero, and his sidekick Bucky. I'm saying that Peter, as Captain America, is the Slightly Tarnished Lawman, is the sensitive, off-in-the-stars, the Great White Liberal who keeps saying, "Everything's going to work out," but doesn't do anything to help it work out. He goes to the commune, hears the people have been eating dead horses off the side of the road—does he break any of that fifty thousand out of his gas tank? What does he do? Nothing. "Hey, they're going to make it." Hey, the Negroes, the Indians, the Mexicans are going to make it. What does he do? He rides a couple of the girls over to another place because he's eating their food. *He does nothing*.

Finally he realizes this when he says, "We blew it." "We blew it" means to me that they could have spent that energy in something other than smuggling cocaine, could have done something other than help the society destroy itself.

**Q:** All right. But I wonder whether this disfavor you've just explained toward Captain America comes across in the movie. I've seen the movie four times, and only the last time did I *begin* to pick up some ambivalence toward Captain America in the commune sequence. I'm asking you as a filmmaker, could you have made it more clear how you wanted us to feel about Captain America—just done it in that one sequence which, I think, is very crucial? Because when Captain America says, "They're going to make it," a lot of people get confused: "Does Hopper really believe that? That's bullshit. But sounds like he believes it."
**A:** I don't think it comes through. I think Peter comes off as simply a Super Hero, or Super Anti-Hero. Bucky doesn't believe they're going to make it. Bucky says, "Hey man, they're not going to grow anything here. This is *sand*."

**Q:** Right, but you give Captain America the last line: "They're going to make it."
**A:** Yeh. Doesn't Captain America always have the last line? "Go to Vietnam." I go to Vietnam. I don't question Captain America. I may be

bitchy or carry on, but Captain America always has the last line. That's the way things are.

**Q:** What do you think the moral effect of your film is going to be—for instance, what will happen when the scene in which Jack Nicholson smokes pot is shown at the Majestic Theatre in Dallas, Texas?
**A:** I don't know. You do something and you do it for a lot of different reasons. I look at that scene on several levels. First, it's dishonest if those two guys on motorcycles don't smoke grass. It's ridiculous, unrealistic. You can't make a movie about these characters in the late 1960s and not have them turn on. And if they have a guy like Jack Nicholson around, they're going to turn him on. That's all, it's that simple, no propaganda intended. But the *main* reason I used pot in that scene was to give me a humorous handle for the Venusian speech—which I consider a very serious piece of work, heavy propaganda.

**Q:** It succeeds as both.
**A:** What I'm saying is, without that device of humor, people would get uptight, say, "Wh-what's he saying?" And this way nobody says, "What's he saying?" I've never had anybody say, "What are you saying in that scene?" And what we're saying is either an incredible lot of nonsense or an incredible lot of not-nonsense. So we made it funny, as in the Victorian period or other periods of oppression, when you wanted to say something hard to take, you always dressed it up as a folk ballad or a humorous little ditty that was sung in a tavern somewhere.

To get back to the moral effect of the scene—the only time a reaction really hit me, really hurt me: in Cannes, Omar Sharif's nineteen-year-old daughter came up—she'd never turned on before—and said that after the film she turned on. I said, "Oh, how'd you like it?" She said, "It didn't do anything for me." I said, "It's probably very difficult for anyone as frivolous as you to feel anything anyway." Because it hurt me, man. Because I didn't make that movie for her to use it as an excuse to turn on—I don't want any nineteen-year-old to go get high just because they see the movie. Look, I've been smoking grass for seventeen years—there've been bummers and good times. All in all, I'm glad I did it because smoking gave me some insight, some paranoia, some self-searching I wouldn't have had otherwise. But not everybody can handle it. And I did not make this movie to turn everybody in the country on to grass. I already assumed everybody was turned on or about to be turned on—without my movie.

**Q:** You're prepared for some very righteous people to come raging up and saying, "What the hell are you trying to do?"
**A:** Yeh, well I've had that. Right. In Cannes, we held a press conference after the film and UPI or one of those news services got up and said, "Why are you making a movie like this? Don't you realize how bad this is for the country? We have enough problems without you doing this terrible movie, etc." Then a young communist said, "Why did you make a movie for $370,000? Why didn't you make a 16mm or 8mm movie and give that money to the Cause? Why are you copping out, putting commercial music to this movie? Blah-blah." And I said, "You're only kidding yourself. If you make a propaganda film, art film, any film you feel has something to say—you *can* work small and show it to people who think like you already, dress like you, wear their hair like you, and you can all sit in a little room somewhere and look at your movie over and over. *Great*. But if you want to reach a large mass of people at this point in history, you *have* to deal with the people who are going to *release* your picture." And I also told the kid, "Hey, all I know is how to make movies. I don't know anything else. It took me fifteen years to raise $370,000. I'm not going to give it to the Cause—I am the Cause."

**Q:** How long did it take to edit?
**A:** A solid year, working the whole time.

**Q:** Did you always have the music?
**A:** I put the music with the film pretty much from the top of the editing.

**Q:** How did you come to the stanzaic structure for the movie?
**A:** I believe that you start a movie very slow, very slowly drag people in up to a certain point. Then, just as they get a little restless, you start socking it to them. This makes me favor the episodic structure, like music—something that moves along with short breaks in it: you keep giving people something new, keep building pressure. Then you cut off, relax, go for a ride.

**Q:** Did you have different movies at different points along that year?
**A:** We had the same film all along, but in different versions: 240-minute, 220-minute, 180-minute, 160-minute, and finally 94-minute.

Basically it was my discipline problem. I loved the 220-minute version because you got the real feeling for the Ride—very hypnotic, very beautiful, like in *2001*. One of the things I liked in *2001* was the hypnotic feel-

ing of movement. We had that at one time with the bikes. You really felt like you crossed country, the same way Antonioni makes you feel you're walking around with a character in his movies—suddenly he creates in you the same boring, edgy sense of time that his character is suffering from.

But how many people were going to sit for three hours and forty minutes of bike-riding and dig it? So it came down to the fact that I wanted to communicate, I wanted to reach as many people as possible. It was important for me to reach a mass of people. And I decided the 94-minute version would do that best.

**Q:** Why the flash-cutting device early in the movie—boom, boom, boom and into a new scene?
**A:** I'm very given to the idea of light transmitting thought. The light-energy bouncing on the screen like that, the six-frame hypnotic flash hitting you, pushing you into the next scene is better, much better than dissolving one image over another and going out of one into another—that's terribly romantic and sentimental to me. And I think that now's not a time for that. There are no superimpositions in the film, no dissolves, we don't have time for that now—now just direct-cut it. This is all a problem of control, of me controlling myself. Originally I had a lot of flash-forwards all through the film. For example, in an earlier version, on that first morning when Peter looks up at the sun flaring through the rafters, I had him flash-forward to a lot of things: Mardi Gras, Jack Nicholson, the stranger on the road, the commune. Very abstract, quick flashes. Finally I cut this down to just one flash: his death-flash in the whorehouse.

**Q:** Why did you reject these other flashes?
**A:** Because I think that one took care of it. Using the other flashes—that's for another movie maybe.

**Q:** Jack Nicholson's character seems written and directed to be fuller than the other characters.
**A:** Right. You run into Jack Nicholson and the whole picture changes. He's the only one constructed to be three-dimensional, the only character whose background and present situation are developed. You're told a lot about Jack: his father's powerful, he played football in school, he's a lawyer for the ACLU, he's poisoning himself with alcohol, he sees flying saucers. You learn an awful lot about him.

You asked earlier if Peter represented America. No, actually Jack is America: he's Trapped America, killing himself. As far as the other people go, you don't know much about them, just basics; Luke Askew is hitchhiking to the commune: why? where's he from? what's he doing? Not important. You get no background on the two hookers. You don't know what the commune is really into. Obviously I wanted you to get closest to Jack. All you know about Captain America and Billy is that they sell cocaine, smoke grass, ride bikes. You don't know they were trick bike riders who worked traveling carnival shows, rodeos, and so on. You don't know that Captain America and Billy originally made their living jumping bikes through flames, etc. At one time, this rodeo stuff was the first scene in the movie. But I finally decided not to do it that way. To explain all that is disturbing to me. I hate to *explain* who everyone is at great length. You see, in the kind of TV shows and movies I've done for the past fifteen years, everything's explained. I mean, *everything*. I mean: even if some kid has ten lines, you know who his father, mother, uncle, brother are; and you know his dog died when he was three and that's why he's a race-car driver. Right?

Now I'm no longer interested in telling you all that. I hope that if you watch the characters, just watch them, you can understand all you need.

**Q:** You don't mind that Captain America and Billy seem two-dimensional?
**A:** All I wanted was for you to be comfortable with Captain America and Billy, just so you wouldn't mind crossing the country with them. And somewhere I gradually wanted you to sort of like them—not necessarily identify too closely with them, but accept them enough so you could lose them in the end.

**Q:** The end shook me up quite a bit, probably because it seems so accidental.
**A:** Not so accidental really. I believe that if Billy hadn't shot the finger to the guys in the truck, there wouldn't have been that existential moment when the guy decided to pull the trigger. It was action-reaction operating when they killed me. They killed Peter because they just didn't know what else to do—it was too complicated for them to work it out any other way. But I'm not denouncing the South in this ending: I say it was action provoking reaction. Businessmen have come up to me after the movie: "I like your movie, but I'm not the guys in the truck. You're saying I'm the guys in the truck." I'm not saying that. The guys in the truck and

the guys on the motorcycles are both the same: criminals, victims of the climate of the country today.

**Q:** So instead of the helicopter shot at the end, you could just as well have driven off with the two guys the truck.
**A:** Yeh, well, not yet. That may come in the 1970s.

# Dennis Hopper Makes *The Last Movie* in Peru

Edwin Miller/1970

From *Seventeen*, July 1970. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate.

Dennis Hopper stands in a cobblestone alley in Cuzco, ancient sun-bleached capital of the Inca, over eleven thousand feet high in the Peruvian Andes. Wearing a cowboy's Stetson over shaggy brown hair, a crumpled chambray work shirt with a bandanna, blue jeans, and scuffed boots, he looks as if he has just stepped down from his motorbike in *Easy Rider*, that burning vision of contemporary violence in which he costars with Peter Fonda. Directing and starring in his new film, which he calls *The Last Movie*, Dennis ignores a swarm of curious ragged Indians with swarthy brown faces and coal-black hair, mestizos (people of mixed blood), a scattering of pale Caucasians. They stare with open mouths as the Yankee stranger, with red makeup spattered over his hands, tries to quiet a skittish horse while his cameraman waits for the right cloud formation to appear overhead. Now in his final week of shooting, after four months of work, Dennis's eyes are red-rimmed with fatigue and sleepless nights, the tensions of carrying a million-dollar movie on his back; his angular face has a remote, brooding air.

Watching Dennis, you would never recognize in him the sweet, shy teen-age actor from Dodge City, Kansas, who in the 1950s played an epileptic in a TV series called *Medic* with such passionate conviction that his own eleven-year-old brother ran shrieking with horror from the TV set. Dennis earned three hundred dollars for that performance. By the next morning, five movie studios had offered contracts and soon after he apprenticed himself to Warner Bros. for seven years.

Jagged mountains surround Cuzco, their peaks a fierce study in black and white. The valley in which the city stands is a mosaic of irregular

patches of soft greens and warm browns, carefully cultivated by Indian farmers who blend into the landscape. Poor, illiterate, they are separated by a social and economic abyss from those Peruvians who trace their descent from the gold-hungry Spanish conquistadores who seized the country some four hundred years ago. Locations for the movie ranged all over the high sierra, from the city itself to an Indian village called Chinchero fifteen miles away, which it took the company cars two hours to reach over mud-filled roads in the rainy season. Some days Dennis appeared wearing a dark brown Stetson, on others he wore white. "There are no good guys or bad guys anymore," he explains, while being made up in the bar of the hotel, sipping pineapple juice and staring with disbelief at scrambled eggs and coffee discolored by bits of clotted milk. A young artist listens while sketching his movements. "The world isn't divided up that way and it's wrong to show things in such simple terms. It leads to violence as a way of solving problems.

"When I was a kid and went into Dodge City on a Saturday to go to the movies and saw John Wayne pick up an ax handle and smash somebody's head in, what he did was all right because he wore a white hat. There were the good guys and the bad guys and whatever the good guy had to do to straighten things out—hit, shoot, whatever it was—it was okay. I was a good guy—nobody thinks of himself as a bad guy—there was no reason why I shouldn't take up an ax handle myself and beat someone if I thought it was the right thing to do. John Wayne had shown me the way. For fifteen years in Hollywood the only role I was able to play was that of a neurotic killer. Kill my mother, kill my father, kill them in bed while they were asleep. Kill strangers, kill somebody all the time in one TV show after another. All the producers were concerned with was: Does the picture have enough violence? If there's enough action, we can sell it. I'd rather a child of mine saw sex in a movie than violence. In a way, irresponsibility in the movie business reflects the irresponsibility of the country, and I feel I have to show the results.

"When Elvis Presley first came to Hollywood to make a movie, he came to see me. He was twenty-one and a millionaire. He had seen James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, in which I had a small role, and he wanted to know more about Jimmy. We were talking about movies, and he said he didn't see how he could hit the actress who was going to play opposite him. I said, 'Just pretend you're slapping at a bothersome fly,' but he said, 'No, I can't hit a woman!' and I suddenly realized that it wasn't a question of motivation. Elvis actually believed that he had to hit the

girl in this scene! He had to fight another actor too, he said, but he was in pretty good shape and thought he could take care of him. I explained that you never actually hit anyone in a movie, that it was all faked but the film was cut in such a way as to give the impression that it actually happened. Elvis was angry. He thought I was kidding him; he couldn't accept the fact that he had been deceived all these years by movies.

"I got the idea for *The Last Movie* six years ago, but it wasn't until after Peter Fonda and I made *Easy Rider* that I could get anyone to put up the money. Then Universal said okay. *The Last Movie* is a study in responsibility. It's about a Hollywood movie company making a Western in a really remote Indian village. The company—Peter plays a small role in one of the sequences—flies in and they erect the false front of a Western street, the houses and the church, the saloon—all this in front of the adobe huts where the Indians live. The camera rolls for the big scene: a pistol is fired at an actor who is standing in front of the camera. The Indians stand around, staring, unable to comprehend that what they see isn't really happening. Blood appears on the man's shirt as he clutches at his chest—one Indian has to be restrained from ruining the shot by helping the man he thinks has been wounded. Then the director shouts, 'Cut!' and the actor gets up and takes off his bloody shirt. The Indians think they've seen a miracle. One snatches up the stained shirt and steals a gun; and after the company leaves, he constructs a camera out of sticks but he doesn't know the secret of the resurrection, of the miracle, and he tries to get one of the Hollywood crew who has remained behind to explain it. The movie explores the difference between various realities. The Indians associate the fake set with real prosperity brought by the movie company; even the priest eventually moves to the false church on the premise that if you can't beat them, join them.

"I'm playing the lead part myself. Originally I didn't want to, but after I tested a number of actors I finally decided it was easier to do it myself than explain to another actor what I wanted. In a sense, the movie is a structured improvisation; the script is there, but the dialogue has been changed and improvised by the actors to express their own approach. Each actor you cast subtly affects the whole by the way he reacts to situations or the way he gives his lines. My character, Kansas, stays behind when the company leaves because he wants to settle down in a little adobe hut, but he's taken over by phony dreams of building a big tourist hotel, an airport, even of building a ski run in an area where it never snows, of finding gold and making a million dollars, all corrupt dreams

which turn his life into a lie. And then when he's finally finished, he asks, 'Why, why did all this happen to me?' We live on those dreams which don't have any relation to reality and they ruin our lives.

"I'm tired of seeing movies which show World War II or Jews being prepared for the gas chambers or pre–Civil War slaves. There's nothing new in that anymore; I've seen it, I know it, I've felt it. Elements of my life are involved in everything I do; I'm making movies as a reflection of the times I'm living in. I work with symbolism, mysticism, realism, and move back and forth among all three levels. The movie is the Sistine Chapel of our century, the greatest art form man has produced. It combines elements of every other art, writing, acting, music, design, everything.

"At first I wanted to make *The Last Movie* in Mexico, but the government put too many obstacles in the way. Censors on the set, for the way the Indians were represented. Someone suggested Peru. I looked for locations all over and wasn't able to find the right one, although I found the country the most beautiful of any I have ever seen. I finally decided to visit the old Inca ruins at Machu Picchu and go home; then, in the office of the travel agency, I suddenly saw a picture with just the elements I wanted: a village of Indian farmers, a church on a big square, adobe huts, the peaks of the Andes in the distance. Chinchero was perfect! Every Sunday about twenty-five hundred people come to a big market; otherwise it's nothing but a hamlet with Indian farmers, shepherds, llamas, rural area with striking scenery. Most of the Indians had never seen a movie; they didn't even know how to fire a pistol. Rifles yes, but they had never seen hand guns before.

"The town was really shaken up when we moved in. The priest tried to sell us community property and charge for the use of the church and collect the money for himself. He had to be replaced and transferred to another church by the archbishop of Cuzco. The mayor of the town was replaced, too. When we were through there, the people wanted me to leave the Western street we built. They said they would finish the buildings themselves and use them, but I couldn't see any point to their using western buildings and a Protestant church—I wouldn't do it. That was my responsibility; that is the thing this movie is all about. I didn't want to disrupt their lives with things that don't belong. I've given them the lumber, about ten thousand dollars worth, and suggested they build a school with it. That's something they can use!"

Later in the day, the archbishop, a balding, middle-aged man with a homely, kindly face, visits with Dennis to work out the details of an

agreement permitting him to film in the Cuzco cathedral. Among other things, they discuss a complaint from Chinchero that the actor who played the part of the village priest had been seen drinking and had fallen while dressed in a cassock. Dennis explains that the actor wasn't drunk but affected by the extreme altitude.

Through his interpreter, the archbishop tells Dennis, "You are a good man, trying to do good for the people with your work; this is the kind of work that brings a man toward sainthood."

Dennis replies, "I'd rather not know it," and adds, "I'm not a Catholic, but by the time I finish this picture I may become one." After the archbishop leaves, he says, "I was an atheist until three years ago when somebody gave me the works of Jude Didymus Thomas, and he really got to me! Let no one come to me, he said, who doesn't hate his father and mother as much as I do, and let no one come to me who doesn't *love* his father and mother as much as I do. Be gentle to others as you expect them to be gentle to yourself. If you wish to strike another, go ahead—but launch the first spear in your own house.

"Nobody ever put it to me that way before, and I've believed in God ever since. Life is too short not to fight for your principles, for the things you believe in.

"I've been criticized by my friends for doing too many things. I've been a photographer for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. An exhibition of my photographs will be shown at a museum in New York. I've done foam rubber and plastic sculpture; I've worked in collage and abstract painting and written poetry. I built up a $250,000 collection of modern art on a five thousand dollar investment because I was taking photographs of the artists before they became popular. I've always been involved in whatever I was doing; and when my friends would tell me that I couldn't go on dissipating my energies, I told them that even though they didn't know what I was doing, I knew. I never felt I was dissipating myself."

Born May 17, 1936, in Dodge City, Kansas, where his father was a railway postal clerk, Dennis was raised on a local farm by his grandparents. As a boy, he dreamed of becoming an actor. "I would go to a movie and come home and dig a trench and play war," he remembers, "wishing I was Gene Autry or one of those actors so I could have a wonderful time. I was always lonely. My mother was working in Kansas City. My father went into the army and we were told he was killed in basic training; he came home again when the war was over—he had been put into the OSS—Office of Strategic Services—only we didn't know it."

Dennis began to take art lessons; but when he was thirteen, the fam-

ily moved to San Diego, California, and he won an appearance on an Art Linkletter talent show, reciting Vachel Lindsay's *Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight.* During his high school years, he also won three dramatic declamation contests in California statewide competitions. The summer he finished his sophomore year, he ran away to the Pasadena Playhouse. He found himself a job frying hamburgers in a local café, and during his spare time he hung around backstage helping to paint flats and move props. The following summer he spent his vacation as a scene-shifter and driver at the La Jolla Playhouse, making just enough to pay for room and board. When he graduated from high school, fellow students voted him the "most likely to succeed." "But teachers hated me," he says, "because I was so involved with acting that I didn't study or anything. I was a crazy kid, mixed up with a wild bunch, delinquents I guess, but I got away from that in acting."

In 1954 Dennis won an acting scholarship—he was one of the three hundred applicants to the Globe Theater playhouse in San Diego. Through contacts, he was sent to a Los Angeles casting agent who put him on a TV show. The exposure was enough to win him an agent and the part of the epileptic in *Medic.* During the months that elapsed between the making of the episode and its appearance on the air, Dennis ran out of money. Discouraged, he went home to San Diego. "I didn't know what to do," he says. "My folks thought I was crazy; they were always against this 'acting stuff.' Around Christmas time, I took a job for a telephone company delivering phone books. It was pretty funny. I would ring the bell and hand someone a telephone book and they would ask, 'Didn't I see you on *Cavalcade of America*?' And my friends kept saying, "But I thought you were an actor!"

By the time he reached nineteen and contract-player status at Warner's, Dennis wore an air of sweet simplicity. He was warmly enthusiastic about acting even while he had doubts concerning his ability to top his performance on *Medic*. But then a touch of disillusion set in. "You go around," he said at the time, "thinking to yourself, 'Boy, if I could only make a movie with the stars.' Then I'm suddenly in a picture like *Giant* with Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor when only a few months before I was sitting and watching those people with a bunch of other kids in a theater. It's not like I imagined it. The stars, so big and glamorous on the screen—you find out they're only people."

It was during the making of *Giant* in 1955 that he cemented his friendship with James Dean, whom he had met working on *Rebel Without a Cause*. "When we were together again in *Giant*, Dean helped me with my

acting. He would watch me and talk to me about the things I did. I was probably a lot better actor then than now." But by the late fifties, Dennis found himself in difficulty. "I had a reputation," he says," for being uncontrollable. It began when I made a movie called *From Hell to Texas* for Henry Hathaway in 1957. I refused to take direction from him. He wanted to outline every move the actor made, and I thought I knew what I was doing and I fought it. By the time I finished the picture, word went around town, and nobody hired me to make a major movie again. For years I thought to myself, if I could only get my hands on him, I'd really give it to him. Then about seven years later, he called me in to play a role in *The Sons of Katie Elder*, which starred John Wayne. I was that much older, and I accepted the role, but again, I didn't take direction from him.

"Finally, everything was finished except my scene, and Hathaway called me into the lab and said, 'Look over there.' He had cans of film stacked up in rows, one after the other. 'I'm a rich man,' he said, 'I own part of the studio. We're going to shoot this scene over and over again until we do it my way. If you want to make a career out of it, go ahead. I've got as much time as you have and more.' We shot take after take. I gave it to him every way but the way he wanted it. People were calling up from the front office screaming, 'Get it finished,' but we kept right on. By the seventy-eighth take, I broke down crying. I said, 'All right, what do you want me to do?' When he had finished, he came over and threw his arms around me and kissed me, with that cigar still stuck in his teeth.

"Henry Hathaway taught me a great lesson, a lesson I don't think I was able to accept until that point in my life, but one I've never forgotten. Don't fool around with the director! He's the man in charge and he gets what he wants. Just imagine what a mixture of styles and effects you would get if everyone was doing his own thing as an actor in a movie, what confusion! I love Henry now. I made *True Grit* for him, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for him.

"I used to have a lot of problems as a person, but I think I've worked most of them out. I had an enormous capacity for hate, which I think I'm better able to control now. I used to go to parties, have a few drinks, and begin to denounce people there whom I felt were incompetent at their jobs making movies. Now I may feel the same, but I can control myself. I can play the game the way it has to be. I talked to analysts a couple of times, but I never went into psychoanalysis. I never felt I wanted to take any criticism."

Dennis lost some twenty pounds during the making of *The Last Movie*. "I've always wanted to be a director," he says, "ever since I walked onto

a set when I was eighteen years old. That's when I realized that an actor couldn't fulfill himself on film, that the director had complete creative control. But until *Easy Rider*, I didn't have the chance. Most of the movies I've had to work in represent the kind of picture I'm fighting against. *Easy Rider* shows the violence underneath everything, how we talk freedom and democracy but can't bear anyone different from ourselves. The motorcycles, those beautiful motorcycles, in the movie really represent the American creation, but the two riders skimming across the country don't know what they're doing—they've blown it, really copped out. Like their visit to the commune. The people are starving, someone has shot a horse for food, and Captain America keeps saying, 'Beautiful, beautiful, they'll make it, Billy.' But they won't make it. He's got fifty thousand dollars in his gas tank—none of that's meant to be real, it's all symbolic even though motivations are credible on a realistic level—but he never takes out five dollars to give to the people to buy food. Captain America is Wyatt Earp, the sheriff riding the range; I'm Billy the Kid, representing the outlaw element. At the same time, whatever Captain America does is all right with me; I'd lay down my life for him. But the two riders never become involved; they're sick, too, just like the Establishment. They won't take responsibility for what they see around them; they have the wrong goals, false values.

"I spent two years of my life on *Easy Rider*. My marriage broke up because of that film." (In 1961, Dennis had married actress Brooke Hayward, daughter of actress Margaret Sullavan, who at one time was married to Henry Fonda.) "My wife didn't believe I could bring it off and wanted me to keep trying to put *The Last Movie* together. Maybe Brooke didn't want me to succeed. Sometimes people may feel that success takes you away from them, maybe you won't be dependent on them anymore, who knows? We had some great times together, some terrible times, too. We have a six-year-old girl, Marin, and Brooke has two boys by her former marriage; they're all with her now. When we split up, I told her to take the house and the art collection, everything; I didn't want any hassle, and you find out after a while that physical possessions are not important."

Throughout the shooting of *The Last Movie*, Dennis wore a Mexican bronze-and-silver ring bearing the face of an idol. The ring had once belonged to James Dean. "It was given to me," he explains, "just before I began the picture by a girl who got it from the lawyer who cleaned up Dean's apartment after he died." During Lent, in the last day of shooting, near the town of Puno, the company slept in an empty church. One

of the actors, Don Gordon, recalls that in the middle of the night, he woke up to find weeping Indians entering the church silently one by one with lighted candles, stepping over the motionless film people in their sleeping bags, to pray silently before the altar. He went outside to find Dennis staring up into the sky at a comet. Suddenly, eerily, the ring broke apart and the pieces fell to the ground.

# Dennis Hopper Saves the Movies

Tom Burke/1970

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The room in the hotel in the Andes is small and green; air hangs in it dense as moss, because Dennis Hopper prefers to keep his drapes drawn, especially at night. He has been living in the room for almost two months, while directing himself in the starring role of a movie that he conceived and wrote (with a scenarist, but it's Dennis's show, fade-in to fade-out), and wanted to make in Mexico, and then decided to make in Peru because the Mexican government had seen *Easy Rider* and told him that, if he came there to work, all the actors would have to wear shoes, and censorship is one of the myriad fascistic ploys which Dennis intends battling to the death. Three of the room's walls are hung with paintings he has bought in South America, depressing studies of saints with watery walleyes and masochistic demeanors. Dennis looks at them often as he talks, glancing up from one of the twin beds as if consulting them. The other bed is occupied by his roommate, Pilar, a lovely Peruvian girl with applebutter skin and hair the color and length that Dennis's used to be, before he cut it off for his new film. Pilar neither speaks nor understands English, but listens to him intently, watching with mild, diffusive concern as he sniffs cocaine from a tiny silver scoop, a dollhouse teaspoon, and talks about his next movie. Not his current movie, the one he is making in Peru, which is called *The Last Movie*, but the movie he and Peter Fonda are planning to make immediately after it, which is called *Second Chance*.

"If Peter straightens up," he is saying, and he doesn't smile when he says it. One waits, having noticed that it is inadvisable to ask him direct questions about Peter Fonda. When one does, suddenly his cigarettes or the distant mountains or the details of the coke scoop become intensely interesting to him. One must be satisfied with enigmatic bits of informa-

tion dropped by minuscule pinches into rambling monologues, the way Hollywood acid freaks drop grains of strychnine into bowls of sunshine punch, to heighten the trip. "And what it will be about is going from LA to New York with Peter several years ago, the year the Pope was there, and how we tried to raise money for *this* movie. And, uh, these people turning us down. These big producers who didn't like the sound of the picture. And that's one thing the picture will do, man—give me a chance to *show* these frivolous men, man, who laughed at us then. We were asking Carter Burden, man, we were asking Huntington Hartford, we asked George Plimpton, man, these cats who could have written the bread off their undershirts; everybody Peter knew, and everybody I knew, and I was very well-married at the time. And, uh, seeing a pigeon with a broken wing in the snow; and watching helicopters land on the, uh, Pan Am Building; and sitting in the Russian Tea Room with this civil rights activist who told us that black power is in, that it's all over for whitey, man; and Peter's father's limousine dropping Bobby Walker and me at this church, and us trying to get into the church on acid, and everything is covered with black crepe because the Pope has just left."

He stops as if the film ends there, but after a short emphatic sniff from the spoon he continues in his soft, reedy tenor, the voice of a Midwestern undergraduate. With all his hair and his moustache gone, and his eyes drug-bright, he almost looks like one. "And going to the Cloisters, and seeing there the copy of the Mérode Altarpiece, this painting of Mary in a Flemish kitchen and Joseph in his workshop making a rattrap to catch the devil. See, it was painted in 1425 by this man by the name of Robert Campin, who was known as the Master of Flémalle. Robert Campin was the first painter ever to use oils seriously. He thought that artists should control all the communications in the country; and, uh, there was this unpopular war going on at the time involving the artists' guilds, and it stopped all communications. Then, uh, Robert Campin took over, in a sort of bloodless coup. And what he did was, he saved art, man. He gave art a second chance."

For the first time in perhaps an hour, he glances over at Pilar. She has fallen asleep, and he seems mildly annoyed. "And, and the way the picture *begins*, man, Peter and I are, uh, driving out to the airport in LA to start the trip, and, uh, I'm saying, 'We've gotta save the movie industry, man. *We* gotta save it, or it's all over for the movies!' And that's what the picture is about. Do you dig, man? For fifteen years, I had been telling the movie studios it was all over for them. 'You are dying, man,' I shouted, and they laughed at me! I, I sat in a chair, and, uh, watched a fly

dying on the wall. And I thought, if I could just help that fly find an air current, that led to a window. . . ."

His angular face is vivid in the bedside lamp, and he is deadly serious. When Dennis talks about movies, he is always deadly serious, and he talks about them incessantly. Often, he refers to them as motion pictures; seldom, if ever, does he use the word "flick." No matter what you ask him, somehow the answer spins effortlessly, like film through a modern projector, back to his obsession. "My work, man, is my life," he will say, very earnestly. "I have no other life now. You want to understand me, then you have to understand my goals."

Okay; except that a couple of years ago, his goals seemed slightly less complex. Yes, he perceived that the movie industry was in trouble; so did the movie industry, and most of the moviegoing public. People *weren't* going, at least not to expensive spectacles. Salvaging the American cinema is a praiseworthy goal; it is also a goal which, if achieved, means that Dennis will go on working. At any rate, he set out to prove himself in the cleverest way possible: by making a picture for $350,000 that would appeal to the then not-quite-realized youth market. As things stand, his effort, which was based on an idea that occurred to Peter Fonda at three A.M. after a night of blowing pot and playing the guitar, will gross during the next few years between $70 million (Dennis's estimate) and $30 million (a recent trade-paper estimate). And with *Easy Rider*'s incredible success has come, besides money and fame ("irrelevant, man"), and future employment, a new self-image: Hopper, transformed from savior manqué to savior bona fide. The transformation is so recent that Dennis has not yet recognized it. There is no arrogance in it, actually; it is almost pitiably sincere, and, if one respects Dennis's unquestioned talent, somewhat worrisome. Cynics have written that *Easy Rider*'s principal message was that when persons with long hair travel in open vehicles, they ought to do so in groups larger than two; nevertheless, the picture did make a simple, persuasive statement about the perils of further escalating America's great life-style war, and it spoke directly to the kids who buy all the tickets. Dennis's next two projects are very significantly different: both movies are *about* movies, or rather, movies about how Dennis feels about movies, a subject of consuming interest to movie-industry people, most of whom, unfortunately, manage to get into movies free.

On location, one is advised not to bother reading the scenario of *The Last Movie* because, "Well, you have to see it." This is oddly disturbing, when you consider that Dennis Hopper demonstrated remarkable ability as a director in a first film that could easily be explained in a simple

sentence or two, and it becomes even more disturbing after one talks to the large cast that Dennis has brought to Peru from Hollywood and New York. All the actors are his personal friends—he refuses to work with people he does not know well—and all exhibit profound and obviously genuine respect for him as a director, writer, actor, and visionary, and yet not one can explain exactly what his movie is about. Then you read the script and you understand why. The first thing one sees on the screen is leader numbers, reeling off backward, 9-8-7-6-5, etc., so that you know you are watching A Film. Then one sees, within The Film, another film, a big Hollywood Western being made in a small Peruvian Indian village. There is the real village, and the fake, movie-set village; when the Hollywood company finishes and departs, it leaves the movie-set village erect in the real village, and the real villagers, who have observed all the fake gunfights, fistfights, and shootings, begin to make *another* film, a pretend film. Except that *their* fights and shootings are real. They construct elaborate symbolic cameras, microphone booms, and light reflectors from sticks and flowers, and carry these in quasi-religious ceremonies; they desert their church, and their priest, and carry the statues from the altar of the real church to the altar of the movie-set church. They force a dissolute cowboy stuntman named Kansas—Dennis plays this role—who has taken the pratfalls for the Hollywood star in the Hollywood film, to act out the star's role in their ersatz film. Or, rather, their pretend version of the Hollywood film. Kansas isn't in very good shape to begin with (he drinks), and at the end they threaten him so fiercely that he dies (via slow motion, flash-forwards, flash-backwards, etc.) of fright. Or a heart attack. Perhaps. The end isn't really finalized yet. It may be that in the last sequence of *The Last Movie*, Dennis Hopper—not the character he plays—gets up, after death, and jeers at the camera. To indicate that what we have watched is a film about a film. Or rather, a film about *several* films. Or a film about Dennis Hopper making a film about several real and imagined films. Perhaps.

Riding in the red Ford truck from Cuzco, where the hotel is, to Chinchero, the real Indian village where all this is being accomplished, I ask Dennis if he has read the plays of Luigi Pirandello, especially *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Well, he knows of them, of course. "I never read much, man, I don't like reading. I've read maybe seven, eight books in my life. I don't want to read about experiences, I want to have them; you know, go out in the street, man, get it *on*." It is just past dawn, but he is wide-awake, eager to get to work, and he drives with abandon. The truck

will appear in the picture, and on its side is lettered, "KANSAS—Hollywood, Calif.—Broken Bones But Rarin' To Go!" Dennis is also dressed as Kansas, as he has been during every waking moment since his arrival in Peru: rancid Levis, stovepipe boots, rancid work shirt, scruffy Stetson. He holds a bottle of Peruvian beer, and a cigarette. In his shirt pocket are several joints which he rolled before leaving, but may not smoke until nightfall. "I swear, man, I get so wrapped up in the work that some days I actually *forget* to *turn on*." Beside him is the beautiful silent Pilar, staring moodily out at the dirt road, at brown Indians on muddy hillsides herding testy, foolish-looking llamas, at the occasional brown cluster of roadside huts, and at the highest Andes, jutting too abruptly and independently, back-lot peaks painted on expertly stretched canvas.

"Dig those mountains, man. Far out. The Indians have seen flying saucers land up there." The subject of the film, and its meaning, is introduced. Dennis takes a long, thoughtful swig from the beer bottle and wipes his mouth on his sleeve. "Well, it deals with, uh, several levels of reality. Symbolism, mysticism, and realism. And that is what life is to me: an inseparable combination of those three elements. Like, when you really get into the *I Ching*, man. Whew! I mean, man, there aren't any accidents."

Yes, but the picture?

"Well, first, man, I want to make the audience believe; I want to build a reality for them. Then, toward the end, I start breaking down that reality. So that it, uh, deals with the *nature* of reality. I don't know whether I'm going to die or not at the end, but at the *very* end you'll see lots of cuts of old movies, like W. C. Fields and Mae West and so on. Universal, which put up the money, they've got a fantastic old film library, man. I can do anything I want with it. Then the film jerks and cuts and tears, and you see the leader numbers again, so that, uh, it doesn't matter if Kansas dies or not, it's the *film* that dies."

Pilar has made a small noise; there is a starved dog sleeping in the road in front of us. Dennis tromps the brakes with such vigor that we nearly hurtle over the mile drop to our left. The dog regards the truck's bumper with feverish indifference, rises with difficulty and limps away. "And it's about, uh, your responsibilities when you make movies," Dennis says, shifting gears impatiently, "because in the next few years, well, I believe—I *know*—that motion pictures are going to evolve, from adolescence into full-blown maturity. With subliminal cutting, for instance, it's going to be possible to make Adolf Hitler into a sympathetic character. Show him burning Jews and cut in with tiny flashes of, say, a mother

and a baby, and the audience is going to come out saying, 'Gee, what a sympathetic guy!' So the film maker has got a *responsibility*, man! When I was first trying to get this done, they asked, 'Does it have any sex and violence?' Well, right now, we're communicating to the *world* with our movies, and is *that* really what we want to communicate? I know that when I was a kid, I believed that those bullets up on the screen were real, that those cats were *dying* up there! I remember when Elvis Presley came to Hollywood for his first picture, we met, and he told me he was worried because the script called for him to hit Debra Paget. And he said to me, 'Man, I never hit a woman before.' Now, he believed that movie fights were real, and that movie bullets were real, and when I explained that they weren't, he got *very* pissed off at me! And Elvis was *twenty-one years old* at the time! That proved to me the influence of motion pictures. The form is now fifty years old, we're in the same period as the artists were right after the, uh, Flemish Renaissance! Fifty years later, man, came the Italian Renaissance; and, man, film makers should be making Sistine Chapels now! Michelangelo and da Vinci, they didn't dig working for that Establishment Pope, but they didn't get negative about it, they tried to do something that was a little uplifting. Not dirty, not violent! And *that's* what it's about, man!"

He smiles politely, awaiting the next question. Perhaps it is the altitude, which renders everyone but Peruvians perpetually light-headed, or the sun's ultraviolet rays, excessive at this height; but for the moment, one has no further questions, and joins Pilar in her steady blank forward gaze. The truck is nearly vertical now, in pure ascent, and Dennis shifts gears again. "Arrunngh, arrunghunngh," he says happily, making engine noises. One breathes deeply and tries to recall the specifics of the scenario: a man brutally shot down (in the opening), Indians killing one another with bare fists, an Indian with his throat cut, dying sheep with slashed, gaping throats, a whore beaten slowly unconscious, a whorehouse orgy, a man beaten and tortured by the mob, his hands broken methodically by boot heels, his blood, his death by fright. The question is not fashionable, but one asks it: in what way, exactly, can any film make much of a statement against sex and violence by dwelling on both for much of its running time?

Square, a square query. Dennis stares ahead at the road, still smiling. "Well, what can I say, man? I mean—see the movie."

We go around with that a few more times. "Can't tell much from the script," he asserts. I ask why, considering that the script is very complete, and that he seems to be following it closely. "Well, I, uh, improvise." But

the script is followed? "Sure, scene by scene. Still, I believe in taking the moment, going with it, moment-to-moment reality, the little miracles that happen every day. A dog wanders into the shot when I die, it's beautiful, how do you explain it?" He laughs. "That there are a lotta stray dogs in Peru? Okay, but to me it's like little miracles. That's what Fellini does: makes the most of the unplanned moment. Except the big difference between Fellini and me is that I make movies in eight weeks, and he makes movies in eight months." Again he laughs, quite modestly. "As if that were the only difference. But man, I never met a director in my life who gave a shit about keeping to the schedule, or staying under the budget, and I care, man, I really care."

In this case, as Dennis is quick to point out, his concern is not particularly lofty. It's a simple matter of dollars and cents, specifically the $850,000 to $1 million which Universal has given him, on the strength of the *Easy Rider* bonanza, to go do his thing, make a movie, any movie. Dennis has demanded and been granted complete control, total autonomy, as long as he stays within the budget. "But, listen, man, once I exceed that $850,000 mark, they start taking points away from me. I'm being paid *nothing* to do this picture—well, $500 a week, but what's that? Instead of a salary, I'm retaining fifty percent of the movie's profits. And by the time I exceed the million dollar line, I could, contractually, lose *all* my fifty points, and end up working for nothing. I don't care about that. Far worse is that if I spend too much, they have a right to send *another director* down here!" He is suddenly very excited, very pale, and barely looks at the road. "Well, that's not gonna happen, man! No way! This is my picture, nobody else is *gonna* get it!"

Pilar raises her gentle hands to her ears; he glances at her, and laughs his high, embarrassed giggle, a sound he often makes in tense situations. "Wow! *Whew!* But that's me, man, I really get involved. We're already about three days behind schedule. The rain up here. But if I get everything done today that I've planned, we'll be back *on* schedule by sunset. . . ."

By sunset, he is. If one invested money in movies on the strength of the director's diligence, one would readily lay out at least a couple of hundred thousand after a morning on the set of a Hopper picture, especially this one. The logistics are remarkably difficult. Chinchero's town square is actually a series of dusty or muddy circles around a weathered statue of some forgotten Spanish war hero, shadowed by the mountains and by the only impressive building, the inevitable church. Most of the area's few thousand Indians gather here every day before sunrise, even before

Dennis arrives, and stay until dusk, breast-feeding their children, kicking their bony dogs, and watching the actors with a certain bemused, almost cynical curiosity.

When needed, a handful of the men are recruited to carry lights and equipment; for this, they receive the equivalent of a little more than a dollar a day, and the Indians who serve as extras—some shots require hundreds—receive a little less. What they don't get in currency, however, Dennis makes up for with courtesy. He is elaborately kind to them, even when they are uncooperative, or bored, or purposely obtuse, which they often are, and has taken the trouble to learn a bit of Quechua, their obscure complicated language. To his actresses—there are four important female roles in *The Last Movie*—he is firm, but courtly. He addresses them as "man," but treats them with boyish, almost bashful respect, as though they were plain girls at a prom with whom no one else bothered to dance.

With the males, he is quite another Dennis, all blusters and cursing, a hip Otto Preminger. One or two faulty takes he endures with business-like calm. "Cut!" he says quietly; then, gently; caressingly, to the actor, "Listen, man, now what did I tell you about this shot? Huh, man? Now, please, man. You know we're a little behind. Okay?" He turns to the watching crowd. "May I have quiet, please? Okay: action—roll it, please."

But the next "Cut!" he spits out like a profanity, and in two long strides he is facing his actor, sculptured nose to sculptured nose.

"Now, you listen to me, man—"

"Wait a minute, Dennis," the actor begins.

"Wait a minute for *me*, man! For *me*! I'll tell you one more time, if you elaborate on *anything* in this shot, we are dead! Just do what we rehearsed, Mr. Actors Studio, or I'll cut off your cocaine supply. Now, get it together!"

The actor turns very pale. The next take is perfect. Dennis must immediately go into a sequence in which he directs himself and a girl in a highly emotional scene. He glances nervously at his watch, then runs over to his actor, embraces him, and whispers something at which they both roar with laughter.

"Vince," Dennis yells at his assistant, "have we got time, man, for this scene before lunch?"

"Only fifteen minutes, Dennis."

"Well, let's go with it anyway, man."

Of course the shot takes half an hour. Not even the dour grips and

electricians seem to mind, proof of what may be Dennis's most notable gift, the executive *machismo*. If somebody protests the brutal schedule, he does not shout; but he appears so profoundly injured at this lack of team spirit, so genuinely crestfallen, that it is simpler, if one believes in him, to shut up and overwork. On his set, it is impossible to hear, or to overhear, one word said against him by anyone. Reporters assigned to *The Last Movie* are constantly being drawn aside by the actors, and even the crew, for whispered recommendations. "He's a genius," a lighting man keeps saying. "He *feels*, deeper than other men. I love this guy. I'm not queer, but I swear, I love this guy, I almost love him *physically*."

On the other hand, every decision, from the smallest to the most complicated, must revert to Dennis. The picture does have a producer, a distracted, taciturn man named Paul Lewis, but apparently he is only a figurehead. "Universal," says Dennis, "made the deal with *me*, *I* make the rules, man, I mean, *I* hired my own *producer*." One of a movie producer's functions, in the course of a routine movie, is to schedule interviews, and the singular despotic situation of *The Last Movie* does not make the journalist's lot easier, partly because it is virtually impossible to see Dennis alone. One assumes, early on, that this is the fault of the twelve-hour-a-day six-day workweek; then one notices that when he *is* available, a friend always happens to be present, too; and that when questions shift from a professional to a personal level, Dennis and his friend swiftly shift them back again, to movies. Lunches on location become impromptu press conferences, in which the various reporters vie, in a subtly choreographed assault, for the strategic places closest to the director. But Dennis makes it clear that lunch break is a time for light conversation, eating, and midday joint-smoking; and anyway, these little group sessions are pretty much dominated by the writer from *Rolling Stone*, a very tall adolescent with opulent jet-black Jesus locks and navel-length beard, who has just "bopped" (his word) in from "Kesey's far-out ranch, man, up in Oregon," with one pair of jeans, a tape recorder, and a great, great deal of enthusiasm, and who almost literally snaps at Dennis's heels, his eyes dilated with the sheer ecstasy of being next to a Noted Film Maker. And so luncheon repartee deals mainly with Kesey's ranch, Kesey's bust, Kesey's bus, Jagger's concert, Jagger's rap, and the far-out, spaced-out, mind-blowing mountains, about which one has to get back and tell one's old lady. ("Man, what a right-on place for a commune!") And the Revolution, stateside. And movies, of course. Kenneth Anger! Haskell Wexler! Peter Bogdanovich! The juxtaposing of images! Antonion*ioni*! Farr ouut!

The older reporters—their median age, alas, is thirty-two—exchange despairing looks, and the more aggressive attempt to interrupt, but it is no use. Obviously, Dennis likes and trusts this boy, and addresses most of his remarks to him, even answers to questions asked by others. One gets the idea—possibly misguided—that Dennis Hopper is a man to whom trust comes with utmost difficulty, and who, in the end, trusts only strangers, and the very young.

He calls the customary, "Cut, print it!" Within five minutes, the evening rains begin, turning the road home into a blur of reddish slime, but he is exhilarated. The day has been completely successful, and there has been another pleasant development. For some time, it seems, the mayor of Chinchero and the district governor have been vying with the local priest for the goodwill of the Indians, and *The Last Movie* has finally brought this condition to a head. Several officials have drawn Dennis aside, during the afternoon, to explain that his offer to leave his movie set there in the town intact, when the work is over—the way it happens in his script—so that the people may use the building materials to advantage, has inspired the whole community. The priest will no longer be so powerful; the people will now look to the mayor and the governor for leadership. They will build a new school. Or, as Dennis puts it, "They're gonna get their town together, man, they're gonna break with that priest, stand on their own. It's going to be gorgeous, man!"

We are stuck in the fifth mud rut in perhaps a mile, and he guns the truck's engine, holding in his right hand both a Winston and a joint. "The ancestors of those Indians, they built this land, laid stone on stone, independence was their tradition." An actor friend, whom he has brought along for the ride, says, "Right, man! This movie, man, has shown them the way to revolution! Like, *Easy Rider* exposed one kind of imperialism, and this flick puts down another. Wow! Holy shit! Nobody ever thought they'd make it in Cuba, right? And they did, man, they did!"

I ask Dennis how much he knew of Peruvian politics before he arrived. "Well, really nothing, man. Not much. I just sort of . . . fell in, you know?"

(Days later, at a dinner party in Lima, a Peruvian movie director who spent a year making the only studious, full-length documentary film about his country, smiled quietly at the reports from Chinchero. "I have great respect for Dennis," he says in Spanish, "I visited him there, you know, on his location. He has much talent, he is a fine boy. But . . . he

doesn't seem to realize that the Indians are not affected by these little political power plays. They will always revere their priest, as they have for centuries. The Incas had their sun god, the Indians have their Church. Build a new school, they will not go. What need do they have for reading and writing, when they have, as always, their cattle, their crops? A movie coming to their town; it makes no difference to them, once it is gone. Build cameras of sticks, play at film making?" He laughs softly. "No, of course not. It is something that would only occur to a leisure class. But that is not a criticism of the movie Dennis is making. I think he can make gold from straw. He has his own—hmm—his own vision.")

It has taken three hours to make the muddy trip back to Cuzco, and Dennis is plainly exhausted; still, he welcomes a few of his closest friends, all male, to his room to smoke, sniff, and drink beer and Pisco, the Peruvian brandy. They are all dressed like Dennis, who is dressed like Kansas; cowboy boots are propped on the bed's edges, ten-gallon hats pushed back on brows, or tilted forward for a sinister effect. Everyone has known everyone else for years, there is an ambience of shared experience. Then what is wrong? Why does one sense the same curiously formalized, subtly wooden group demeanor one has sensed before in these midnight gatherings? Why should one perceive here these little wisps of distrust? Everyone looks at ease; the conversation is spontaneous, desultory.

"What a far-out day, man! Whew! Those Indians—outasight cats, man."

"I want to buy a ranch down here, man, bring the old lady down. Few head a cattle, some stallions. Far out."

"You wanta fetch your ax, man, play us a tune?"

"Naw, that's too heavy, man. . . ."

Ax, one has learned, means guitar. It is not fetched, because they are yawning, getting up, stretching, heading for the bunkhouse. The Marlboro men. That's it, of course. They must convince one another of these curious, bogus identities, and they are about as believable as the wranglers in cigarette commercials. There is no self-parody here, they move and speak as if born to the saddle; yet among them are two actors who have appeared extensively on Broadway and television, and spent most of their lives in casting offices, or bars like Joe Allen's. A third, an unknown musician named Kris Kristofferson who's composing the film's score, was, one discovers, a Rhodes Scholar. And then, of course, there is Dennis, movie actor since *Rebel Without a Cause*, Shakespearean actor before that, painter, sculptor, photographer (his pictures have appeared in

*Vogue*), early collector of Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, friend of Jean vanden Heuvel, early defender of Miles Davis, former husband of the daughter of Broadway producer Leland Hayward, student of the Flemish and Italian Renaissances.

When they are gone, and we are abruptly alone (except, of course, for Pilar, who is dozing on her bed), I again try some nitty-gritty questions. Dennis, in a diversionary tactic, decides to order up some more beer, but before he can get to the phone, I ask about his marriage. "Well, uh . . . well, Brooke was all right, man. Her mother died of an overdose of barbiturates, you know? She was Margaret Sullavan, who was once very big in films and on Broadway and her father was originally her mother's agent, and I think that when her father branched out and became a producer, the marriage broke up. When he became independent. The same thing happened to us. When I was leaving to make *Easy Rider*, Brooke said, 'You are going after fool's gold,' and that didn't read very well with me. We've got a great little baby daughter, who I don't see too often, because I'm away working so much. After I cut my hair off, I sent it to my daughter, because I wanted her to have it. I, uh, sent it to her in an old Polaroid box I had. . . ."

Pause. Dennis yawns, studies the bedspread. I ask about his childhood, and, surprisingly, he sits up, stimulated, and begins talking about Kansas—Dodge City, Kansas, where he was born in 1936. "In movies about Dodge City, man, they always put in big mountains, but there aren't any, just wheat fields stretching to the horizon." When his father left to fight World War II, he went to live with his grandparents, on their farm near Garden City, "where *In Cold Blood* happened, they made the picture there, too." Summers, he helped with the wheat harvest, "and I'm going to make a picture about that, man—the harvest trains that start in Oklahoma and follow the crops, same families every year, great long lines of combines and trucks moving across that flat horizon. They're beautiful, simple, trusting people, man, those Okies, somebody should do a film about them." Winters *and* summers, he spent every Saturday in the local movie house. "I'd walk into town with my grandmother, she had her apron full of eggs, and when she sold the eggs, we'd take the money and go to see Gene Autry, or Smiley Burnette, or Roy Rogers. Then all the next week, I'd live that movie, man! Those dark movie theatres in Kansas, Saturday afternoons, that was big news to me!"

When he was fourteen, the family moved to San Diego. "The reason I'm creative," he says, with elaborate irony, "is that when I first saw mountains, I was seriously disillusioned." (Pause; he has told this story

before, and has the timing worked out.) "The mountains in my head were much bigger, and the ocean—why, hell, I thought, 'that's the same horizon line as in my wheat field.' " High school bored him. "I thought, I already know more than most of these kids. Why should I study other people's ideas, when I can find everything out just by using my ears and eyes? It was an ego trip, but when I look back, I'm glad. I was right, man. A lot of college graduates put art on too high a pedestal, they can think, but they can no longer create. They should learn to think through their *senses*, man."

He was shy, he says, but felt compelled to enter debating contests, which he usually won. His seventeenth summer, he apprenticed at the La Jolla Playhouse, then run by the actress Dorothy McGuire and her husband, John Swope. With his high-school diploma, he received a scholarship to the National Shakespeare Festival at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, and when he played in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*, the Swopes came to watch, told him to go to Hollywood, and gave him introductory letters, which no one read. He delivered phone books, stole milk from porches, "and, you know, just generally sort of hustled." It is the familiar actor's litany: a television walk-on, a ten-line part, a ten-minute part, and offers from three movie studios. At Columbia, the legendary Harry ("King") Cohn wanted to sign him, but added, "We'll have to send you to acting school, to take that Shakespeare out of you." Dennis told Cohn to "go screw yourself," and instantly became an *enfant terrible*: he was banned from Columbia, and so was his newly acquired agent. But Warner Bros. hired him, and cast him in *Rebel Without a Cause*, which was to alter his life totally. James Dean, the picture's star, has been dead fifteen years, but Dennis still talks of him constantly, almost as much as he talks of movies. He has instigated a James Dean memorial mass in Peru, though he obviously has little love for Catholicism; and the sign on the saloon of his movie set reads, "Jimmy's."

"I had seen *East of Eden*, man," he is saying, almost in a whisper, "and then in the commissary at Warner's, somebody told me, 'That's Jimmy Dean,' and I didn't believe it. Here was this grubby guy in tennis sneakers, an old turtleneck and glasses, sitting with a cup of coffee, pouring sugar into it, and watching the sugar dissolve. Spoon after spoon he'd pour, always watching it, till the cup was full of sugar. We were introduced, and he didn't even turn around, he didn't say hello. That's how he was, man. Honest. If he didn't feel like talking to you, he just didn't. Then I got to know him, during *Rebel*, and we found we were so much alike, man, both from farms, this early loneliness, unable to communicate at home,

having to . . . create, to justify our lives. He was the most creative person I ever knew, and he was twenty years ahead of his time. Man, Jimmy and I were into peyote and grass when it was still, like, something you couldn't even mention to your closest buddies."

He is silent a moment, obviously moved by these memories. The cocaine and the spoon are on the bedside table, and he toys with the bottle, but doesn't open it. "Jimmy wanted to direct, too, man. He wouldn't take anything from the studios, wouldn't let them rust his machinery. That's why he was almost fired during *Giant*. He was his own man, man. When he was killed in the car crash, and this guy came to tell me, I hit the guy in the mouth. I said, 'Don't you ever put me on like that again, man!'

"I couldn't get things together for a long time after that. . . ."

In his grief, Dennis began his own rebellion against the studio moguls. He had studied with Lee Strasberg, but most of his directors just didn't cotton to Method acting. Dennis started refusing to approach roles any other way, and it got around that he was unemployable, even in television. "For three years, man, I didn't work at all. I stayed home and painted, and cried a lot." During this period, he married Brooke Hayward. The wedding reception was held in Jane Fonda's apartment in New York, and Peter Fonda attended. "And then one night, back in LA Peter called and asked me to come up, because he wanted to talk about writing a movie. . . ."

Dennis owns seven percent of the gross of *Easy Rider*. "Peter's got twelve percent. He, uh, managed to get five points from me." This is said without any malice, but he doesn't elaborate. "Peter behaved beautifully down here, man. I mean, better than he behaved on *Easy Rider*. I only needed him briefly at the beginning; he doesn't have a big part. But he was beautiful, about things like showing up on time, and not crying about where he was, and not complaining about whether he had lunch or not, and not calling off shooting just because he hadn't eaten. Almost everybody has been beautiful, man. I mean, we had sort of a bad start: thirty-eight of them came down together on a plane from LA. I was already here. So what do they do? As soon as the 'No Smoking' sign is off, a goodly number of joints are lit simultaneously. They turned on two stewardesses before they got to Lima. No, listen, man, this is not funny! An international flight! I mean, I expect people to be cool! I carry *nothing* across international borders! I'm paranoiac enough without making that scene!"

Then where did he get his present supply? Cocaine is purchasable in

Peru but, generally, marijuana isn't, and I have noticed that on his director's chair on the set, someone has drawn, under the "Dennis Hopper," a little sun and written, "Take Sunshine!!" He smiles, somewhat patronizingly. "The coke and grass I bought in Lima, took me two weeks to get it together. But I'm not into acid that much, it never really changed my head. Peyote did; I took peyote fifteen years ago, man. Acid was like an afterthought, a synthetic. I mean, *I'd* had the *real* thing, the *flower*. I don't *have* to have coke or pot, but I feel pretty uncomfortable without some grass around; it's like an old friend. Wow, man! How absurd, that our government makes its, uh, intellectuals feel like criminals with this big taboo system. *I* don't find it kicks to be illegal, man! I've been smoking grass for seventeen years; does it affect *my* functioning? Have I stopped working?"

He is rolling a joint now, looking very agitated. "The FBI heard about that scene on the plane, man, and now there is an investigation going on, and I will probably be busted the minute I set foot back in the States. Wow. *Whew!* I don't care for myself, man, but I've got to edit this *picture* when I get back. I mean, this could affect the *picture*! And even before I get *out* of Peru, there could, well, be a bust, with all the *ding-a-lings* running around loose. . . ."

The ding-a-lings are various young ladies (the *Rolling Stone* reporter refers to them as "our groupies") who are not officially attached to *The Last Movie*, nor indeed to much of anything, except the central tables in the hotel bar, and to Dennis, not necessarily in that order. They have followed the company south, by mysterious means, from various points in the States, for the sole purpose of being in constant earshot of, and eye contact with, the guru of the new maverick directors. Dennis, always the gentleman, is loath to gossip about them, though he will admit, under pressure, to being intimately involved (in the pre-Pilar days) with more than one, especially a slim brunette who is said to carry a pistol, which, if it exists, may or may not be loaded. At first, they were not a problem: Dennis apparently assumed that after the romance of South America had browned around the edges, they would all disappear together on one of the dawn flights out of Cuzco, but this has not been the case. Nobody has left, and nobody has permanent rooms, and if there's a plaintive little knock on your door at two A.M. you can be pretty sure it isn't the housemaid bringing the clean towels. Afternoons, the girls drink Coca-Cola with the somewhat sinister-looking local representatives of Peru's markedly anti-American, anti-pothead government, and it is this indiscreet socializing which irks Dennis most.

". . . For all I know, man, they're telling the chief of police, between sessions, about how the hotel is full of junkies. I have been heavily questioned by the authorities here, more than once. Like, *hey*, man!" He sniffs angrily from the spoon. "All I need is *another* bust, anywhere. I was already busted in LA driving on the Strip at midnight, and they stop me only because my hair was somewhat long, and I was driving an old car. They said I'd thrown a roach out of the car, which I had *not*. Well, I did have this roach in my *pocket*. Then, in court, they produce as evidence not my roach, which was wrapped in *white* paper, but somebody else's roach, which was wrapped in *black* paper. How ludicrous, man! It was dark, they couldn't have even *seen* a *black* roach!"

He breaks off, looking a bit confused, glances up at the paintings, then continues about women. (Pilar seems to be listening again; perhaps she understands more English than she lets on.) The story is very complex, involving an East Coast chick, a West Coast chick, and Dennis's seemingly murky relationships with both, and still another girl, a nonactress whom he felt would have been perfect for one of the film's leads, "the part of the whore, man, because all her important scenes are with Kansas—with me—and I knew the chick, man, inside and outside. The reason I only use friends in movies is that I have to understand an actor's personal psychology. Well, I know all the guys here, but when this chick and I had this little disagreement, and she, uh, decided not to come with us, I had to find another actress in a hurry, and ended up bringing this stranger. Well, I mean, I have tried to get to know her, but she's *married*. Rather standoffish. Also, she seemed to prefer Kristofferson's company. And hey, man, she may turn out to be the only weak thing in the movie! I must *communicate*, man, with my actors! I *hate* verbal acting!"

I remind him that we were talking about girls, not acting; he appears annoyed, but begins a long, convoluted story of a girl he was living with, and a second girl who wanted to move in, too. A third girl friend he drops in on unexpectedly, only to find a stranger (male) inscribing her thighs with quotations from *The Little Prince*. ("No, I didn't yell at her, man, I didn't like to interfere, I mean, the chick was drunk, and I hate scenes, I really hate scenes.") In the course of another romance, however, his patience is too sorely tried, and he kicks in a door, drags a girl by her hair from the apartment of a neighbor (male), and is stabbed through the thigh with a steak knife. Police pop in and out like Keystone Kops; at one point, five of them invade Dennis's apartment with drawn guns, in search of one or more of the above cast ("Thank *God* I happened to be out of dope at the time"). Girls come looking for Dennis, and if he isn't at

home, they become instantly involved with whoever is, male or female.

He is not attempting to amuse with these tales, which sound at times as though he were narrating a serious autobiographical film, and at others as though he were soberly explaining a risqué version of an "Archie" comic book. He is sitting on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands; when he looks up, he is smiling but very sadly. "See, man? My private life is a *tragedy*. I think one of the songs Kristofferson wrote for this picture says it pretty well." He clears his throat, and recites, rather than sings, the lyric:

> He's a poet, he's a picker, He's a prophet, he's a pusher, He's a pilgrim and a preacher, and A problem when he's stoned. He's a walking contradiction, Partly truth and partly fiction. Taking every wrong direction On his lonely way back home.

Long, suitable silence. Dennis's eyes are wet. "Hey, man," he says at last, "I just realized, you're asking me all these personal things, don't ask them, they're nothing, that's not me, my work is me. Or, why don't you ask me something explosive, like about the Chicago Seven? I mean, if those guys were actually *convicted*, then can you imagine what's going to happen to *me*, if the government decides my actors were offensive, smoking on that airplane? And what could happen to the *movie*?"

It seems best to return to personal questions, and I ask about the money he is making. "Money isn't a reality. Hey, man, listen to my schedule for the rest of my life: three months to write a movie, two months to get it ready, two months to shoot it, a year to edit it. Then: three months to write, two to get ready . . . dig? *That's* me, *that's* my life! And *no* vacations, until I'm firmly established! Listen, everybody in Hollywood is saying that *Easy Rider* was a mistake, and that I'm an undisciplined kook! Well, an undisciplined kook doesn't make *Easy Rider* in *seven weeks*! I am *not* a paranoid, I'm just protecting myself, man, against an industry that couldn't care less about me! When Michelangelo was lying on his back, painting that ceiling, did the Pope give a shit about his welfare? All they care about in Hollywood is that the ceiling—the movie—makes bread. And the only reason I care about that is, it will allow me to make *another* profitable movie. Otherwise, success is meaningless. It all goes back to Kipling's *If*, one of my favorite numbers; it says something like, you can treat triumph and disaster the same, because they're both impostors. Which they are. All that matters to me is. . . ."

Very soon, one says goodnight and returns to one's room, and goes

to bed, still wakeful. It is nearly dawn, the likely hour for ponderous thoughts. About movies, and the difficulties that come with success within the American movie industry, no matter who's controlling it. And about the ceilings of chapels: how the Sistine ceiling might have turned out if Michelangelo hadn't had the Pope lurking down there under the scaffolds, hampering his freedom, feeding him discipline.

Important considerations, without a doubt. One suddenly sleeps.

# Dennis Hopper: Triple Threat Talent

*Movies Now*/1971

From *Movies Now*, July 1971.

Dennis Hopper has been called many things. Perhaps the most accurate is complete artist, a "hyphenate": artist-actor-director.

"Da Vinci made a horse out of clay. It was a giant work, five times the normal size. It took him five years to complete. When the war broke out, soldiers shot arrows into the horse. Da Vinci could never recast it again," Dennis began.

That was the image evoked by a simple stick horse made of fireworks by the South American Indians in his latest film venture, *The Last Movie*.

"They are really beautiful people," he smiled, "I miss being there.

"Was I really there?" he reflected for a moment at Musso and Frank's Grill on Hollywood Boulevard over lunch with *Movies Now*.

"You know, it's a very lonely sort of scene. One day you sit down and look around, and you know it's finished. It's no more," Dennis said.

### Upcoming Attraction

After eight weeks on location, and one year and two months in editing, *The Last Movie* is finally ready for release.

His labor of love was one week more in the shooting than his last project, *Easy Rider*. It was shot on location in Peru and Chile twenty thousand feet above sea level in the White and Black Andes.

"It's a test for me," he said, "and it's a test for the audience—to see if there is that audience out there.

"I think people will have to see it twice before they understand it. That's a strange thing to ask people to do if it isn't free."

### A Classic

"I'm not worried about it being a classic, and I'm not being pretentious

by saying that. It *is* a classic. They keep saying classics don't sell, and art doesn't really make money. Art is dead, they say. It would be nice if that weren't true."

Dennis really believes "people are ready to see something as art now and relate to it as art." At the same time, he also feels that "any art that doesn't try to help humanity in some way is not worth anything."

Likened to a cathedral glass window that shatters, *The Last Movie* represents movie morality to Dennis. "It deals with reality: what is real? and what isn't real?"

**Highstepping on Film**

"I show a little fancy footwork. I do all the things other movies do. I can make you laugh. I can make you cry. Where do we go now? It's a play. You can believe in it, if you want," he was almost animated.

"The play's the thing," Dennis broke into a laugh.

"People either love it or hate it. They will say 'It's the greatest movie you ever made,' or nothing, which means they hated it."

Dennis Hopper talks smooth, soft, and slow—always telling a story, sketching the pictures and the people, not flippantly, but with affection and respect in his voice. He talks of Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean. He talks of *Giant* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, his first film. He talks of the original *Sons of Katie Elder*.

"Were you in that?" Angel Tompkins, the pert young lady to his left, asked.

"Oh yes. I played the bad man's son. My father kills me at the end. I die in the 'Big Duke's' arms," he looked up at the ceiling, shaking his long hair back, "Terrific!

"It's been a great experience, man," he paused.

"But once you have the experience of doing something, you like to let someone else do it. It's the normal, the natural thing to do."

And life has been experience for Dennis Hopper. "I've been a pimp, a prostitute—now that was tax free—pusher, preacher, prophet, and problem when I'm stoned," he alluded to the words of "the new American poet": Kris Kristofferson.

"I'm very given to the environment. I'm an environmental child," he shrugged, "I fall in very easily to things.

"I even think of Hollywood as Babylon," he smiled. "We do have to get back to the studios. Come along."

### Editing Is Slow

People were at work. A cat was sprawled, legs high in the air, snugly between both arms of a chair. Reels were spinning. The sound track came out in spurts. "It looks like a lot of fun," he shook his head, laughing, "It's a slow process."

That process is about two years per project. What's on tap for Dennis?

There's *The Peter Hurkos Story*. "It's a new area in film we're going through. I hate to use the word documentary. We will be revisiting his life and psychic experiences, all over the world.

"I've had about fifteen screenplays in my head all these years," Dennis explained, before naming off *Second Chance* as another project with Peter Fonda, about how they raise money for a film.

*Me and Bobby McGee*—the story of a couple hitchhiking around the country together—is another Hopper entry.

Dennis will also top-line two up-coming features, *Dime Box* for 20th Century-Fox, and *Holy Mountain*, for Alejandro Jodorowsky.

There was a lull, a stilled hush. Footsteps made their way to the screening room. It was like waiting for the shouts of "Camera, lights, action." Only this time, it was, "Quiet. Ready to roll 'em."

We sat there in the dark viewing room. Four square black leather chairs were lined up against the console, the lighted numbers ticking off below the screen.

Dennis Hopper was at work. He had on his working clothes: Levis, a Levi top, blue checkered shirt, a string of beads around his neck, and shoulder-strap leather bag. He was in charge. "Can we get a shot on that last cut." The frantic button pushing went on behind us.

The image on the screen was going backwards. Sound became a foreign language. The numbers below the screen clicked down. Stop. Forward again.

"I don't like that laugh; cut the laugh down," Dennis said. "Bring his voice up.

"Not quite so loud," he instructed his technicians to tone down the music.

"The waterfall should come up."

### Revisions and Decisions

He stood up, and paced a bit. "There are quite a few things that are bothering me."

He named them off as the second showing got under way:

"There are too many gun shots at the open.

"There's smoke coming out of that gun. There should be a shot there.

"That first laugh is on the dialogue track?" The expected "yes" was there, then, "The other one we don't need."

The reel was still rolling, forward, backwards, stop. Forward. Backwards.

"We knew what we were doing, didn't we?" he ended the session, "I think?" he added with a smirk.

The next day was showdown. *The Last Movie* was going up for preview. There would be that first taste of critical test. Dennis would keep saying, "It's a test . . . a test for me . . . a test for the audience . . . is there that audience out there?"

The screen was blank. Dennis was in conference in the next room. Leaving was a lonely sort of scene.

As we walked down the quiet corridors, it seemed as if he were still in the room, with that same effervescent ebullience, hugging a friend and saying, "After Wednesday, I'll be pretty straight," he laughed. "That's what I said last Wednesday."

# Dennis Hopper

Jerry Bauer/1972

From *Nineteen*, January 1972. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate.

"Good surviving evil? I have very seldom seen it happen. Yet most children are told that it does. I think the feeling today is kick your brother, turn him into yourself. If you play the game with him, he'll play it with you. Make him over in your corporate image."

Dennis Hopper's clear blue eyes seemed to reflect the anxieties and uncertainties of today, as he sat talking over lunch at the Hotel Excelsior on the Venice Lido in Italy. Dennis and a band of actors had arrived the day before to present *The Last Movie*, his complex non-movie allegory, at the Venice Film Festival.

"My naivety is waning at the moment. The world is not a nice place. Dealings with people are not pleasant. I'm here to succeed at my own game."

Dennis's feelings were particularly aggravated by the fact that Universal, the distributers of *The Last Movie* had refused their full support in releasing the film, which the executives think is noncommercial. According to Dennis, they do not really understand the film.

"I don't enjoy corruption—only my own decadence. I find it amusing, not corrupt. I would like to see society game-orientated, but the games shouldn't descend over into people's daily lives. Life is not a game. It should be considered more seriously. You might say I'm concerned with evolution."

Physically, Dennis had not changed much since I last saw him at the Cannes Film Festival where he presented *Easy Rider*. The hair, a bit longer, now neatly tied Indian fashion with a blue and white bandana, the buckskin outfit traded in for washed-out blue denim terminating in highly decorative bell-bottoms, and around his neck an odd necklace which he later explained was derived from human bone.

"When I was a child, I thought as a child. Now that I am a man, I also think like a child."

He laughed at his self-conscious remark and continued: "Being an innocent does not mean you are stupid. Oh, sure, people will take advantage of you. You see, I used to believe if you were an artist you were something special in this world—like being a priest. You shouldn't be concerned with the business aspect, not that you should have a disregard for the money involved. I believed that if you were an artist, people would have respect for you. It just isn't so.

"Look, I showed Hollywood how movies could be made for a third of the price. But it didn't seem to matter. What mattered was not the price or whether the movie was an artistic success or entertaining. They were interested in whether it would make money." With the unexpected success of *Easy Rider,* it appeared Dennis had accomplished both, uniting the divergent financial and artistic arms of the Hollywood machine. I asked him if he was as rich as purported from the film which grossed more than 24 million pounds worldwide. "I made 260,000 pounds last year from *Easy Rider*. Seventy-eight per cent went to the government for the Vietnam War. I had seven per cent of the film, Peter Fonda fourteen per cent, producer Bill Hayward, five per cent.

"The U.S. censor gave the film an R, or Restricted rating, so many young people who would have liked to see it couldn't. Protecting the wrong minority."

He paused, then went on: "I don't need much money to live, in fact. I can be happy in a little room just to work and write my films. I don't have a compulsive need for worldly objects. The only important thing to me is to make successful films—films that people will see.

"I'm interested in creating something that will justify the fact that I'm going to die one day—a contribution to civilization. But it's more than that. I also enjoy working with people to bring something about.

"Going further, I'm interested in finding and keeping my own reality. What is it? Fundamental truths. As a child, you're told that Santa Claus exists. Then you discover he's really your father and you're being had. In three or four years you learn that Christmas is actually a bastardization of the events surrounding the birth of a guy who was nailed up on a cross.

"All truth and knowledge is reduced to fun and games, not a reverence of what truly occurred. You learn, too, that the emissaries of the Vatican who claim to heal the sick are part of an organization that owns and controls a lot of big businesses.

"I was in Rome and we went to the Sistine Chapel. One forgets Pope

Julius had Michelangelo whipped just because he fell behind schedule with his frescoes. Why? For the glory of God, of the Church?

"*Their* own paintings mock them. You see angels with devil's horns, for example.

"*The Last Movie* criticizes this sort of hypocrisy and shows contempt for the double values in life. It focuses on a Western about Billy the Kid being made in Peru. The natives working in the Western decide to make their own film, which becomes interlocked with a passion play taking place at the same time. Essentially, it is about the corruption of innocence."

Dennis looked out across the interminable waters of the Adriatic; a few swimmers, some sailboats, and the beating sun.

"I've abandoned the cities. I live in Taos, New Mexico, in a house where D. H. Lawrence used to stay. There are twelve hundred people in the village, eight thousand in the whole county. Just high mountains. Centuries ago, the Conquistadors passed through there to find the Golden City.

"I shot the scenes of the Indian pueblo in *Easy Rider* in Taos. I guess that's how I came to know the place and fall in love with it. Various writers have left their mark there. The poet Robinson Jeffers did some of his best writing in Taos, and Reed wrote the script of Eisenstein's *Eight Days That Shook the World* there just before he went to Russia, back in the twenties.

"When you come down to it, I'm a combination of my environment: mysticism, symbolism, and realism. They are all swirling about mixed up together, operating on their best intuition.

"When we keep our eyes open, a lot of things can happen. And I can go three days at a time eyes wide open—without sleep. I'm talking about circumstances interpreted on a mystical level—bringing forces together beyond comprehension. For instance, a friend of mine came to Taos with the ancient thigh bones—a holy object—of a Tibetan Lama priest in his sack. He had bought it from a guy on top of a mountain at Big Sur, and happened to say it was for me. Then a few months ago in Los Angeles, my agent introduced me to a financier interested in my next film, and who do we meet at his house but the man who sold my friend the holy object. I don't know if I'm superstitious, but I do believe in things. As you see, I'm hung up on various mystical objects." He tugged at his necklace.

"Like this. Human bone from Santo Domingo. I believe all objects have power. Everyone handling the object has been involved in bringing

this power about. Things will happen eventually it you get in the flow. It may not advance you materially, but it's sure to interest you very much."

Stella Garcia, the young Latin-looking American actress who plays Dennis's girlfriend in the film joined us. She was on a health diet and ordered fruit. She listened as Dennis continued.

"Love fits into this pattern. There are lots of different kinds of love. I explain it in terms of dialects. Love and hate are equated in dialectic logic. First, there are one to nine numbers, no fractions, no maybes or supposes. One to nine trillion billion light numbers. And either love or hate feelings. You start with one absolute, although it can become the other. You may meet someone and try to conceal your feelings or else say, 'I like this person a fraction.' But in dialectics, you learn to admit that you either immediately love or hate the person. The words 'like' or 'dislike' do not exist.

"Dialectics can also be used to explain our motivations, especially as youngsters. You see, one has either love or hate for one's family. Some years ago, there was a challenge to the famous Dead Sea Scrolls called The Gospel According to Thomas or Doubting Thomas's Sayings of Christ.' One important saying was: If I don't love (or hate) my family, I am unworthy to be a disciple. If I don't hate my family, I won't evolve above them.

"Resentment gives you a drive to change. And once you have established your own independent feelings, you will be able to truly love your family. You just have the courage of your own convictions, which in the final analysis, is the strongest love you can have.

"Moral judgment proclaims: don't lie and don't do what you hate, for all things manifest before heaven.' It continues: 'If you know what you see with the eye and hear with the ear, all the secret wonders of the world are revealed to you.' This leaves you open to do any damn thing you want. But the difficult frailty to overcome is lying. Everyone in the world is prone to lying, but, in the end, you're only hanging up yourself. Gandhi and Che Guevara loved and they died expressing it. The world can never ignore love when a man is willing to give up his life for it. The world may kill him for it, but it will not ignore him.

"Me personally? I have companions, but I have very little time to be with anyone except the people I'm working with. I'm really a very romantic, sentimental person even if I present the opposite façade. I'm twice divorced and I doubt if I shall ever marry again. I was married first for eight years to Brooke Hayward, the daughter of actress Margaret Sullavan and producer Leland Hayward. We have an eight-year-old daughter, Marin.

"I'd been working as an actor for a long time since my teens—*Rebel Without a Cause* with James Dean, *Giant*, *Night Tide*—lots of films. But for fifteen years, I'd wanted to make a film: *Easy Rider*. I would not say that Brooke encouraged me. I believe that she thought her parents' marriage fell apart when her father became successful, so, subsequently, she thought it might happen to us.

"I remember, Brooke was driving me to Los Angeles airport. I was heading for New Mexico to start shooting *Easy Rider*. She commented—rather brutally I felt—that I was looking for fool's gold. I retorted that she hadn't given me any encouragement, that if she really thought this way, she could have a divorce any time she liked. That was the last time we were together as man and wife.

"I was married for eight days to Michelle Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas. She's with Jack Nicholson now. We'd been together off and on for about a year before we finally married.

"Michelle tries to take over everything and everyone in life and, as soon as she does, she leaves. Or, rather, I threw her out of the house after a terrible thing she did to me. Just when you start to miss her, she arrives back. So you say to yourself, if I get her to marry me, I'll possess her. But you don't, really.

"The trouble with signing a marriage document is that it ignores the complexity of the personalities of the two individuals. As soon as it was signed, we began to take each other for granted. That was the tragedy.

"My ideal was that I would be married for life. Now, all I want is to work in films. And I would like to see the universe level out a little. I don't know how to approach it. I'm dissatisfied with the politics of the world. Either a person has a lot or nothing. What we need is a system where all people have an equal shot at education, medical care, things like that. Just the simple necessities of life. In America, kids and young adults don't have respect for society any more. How could they?" He stopped talking and put his arm around my shoulder.

"Have I changed? I can see a difference, but most of my friends are so blind, they don't see a thing. It's just that nowadays, they expect me to pick up the checks . . . but they still don't listen when I'm talking."

# *Gallery* Interview: Dennis Hopper

Lawrence Linderman/1972

From *Gallery*, December 1972.

In the last decade, perhaps no American director has had such a significant effect on U.S. filmmaking as Hollywood's most gifted enfant terrible, Dennis Hopper. In *Easy Rider*, his anthem of the Aquarian Age, Hopper captured the imagination of a generation—while also demonstrating that low-budget films could result in unprecedented, high-level profits. Produced at a cost of only $425,000, *Easy Rider* had already grossed nearly $50 million prior to its re-release this fall. Additionally, the movie also rescued the sagging cinema careers of its three stars—Peter Fonda, Hopper, and Jack Nicholson—all of whom had then seemed destined for screen anonymity. On the wave of the film's success, the trio of easy riders went their separate ways—Nicholson into *Five Easy Pieces* and stardom, and Hopper and Fonda writing their own tickets to direct and act in their own films. Of the three projects, the most eagerly awaited was Hopper's *The Last Movie*. In fact, a full year before its release, such diverse publications as *Life*, *Esquire*, and *Rolling Stone* had already devoted cover stories to it. Before *The Last Movie* opened in America, it won the only prize presented at the 1971 Venice Film Festival, and all the ballyhoo seemed justified. But then a funny thing happened on the way to an Academy Award: After brief and virtually unnoticed runs in two cities, *The Last Movie* was shelved by Universal International Pictures. Angry about the treatment accorded his film, Hopper expressed his ire in terms loud and clear enough to make him a movie industry outcast. However, since he's usually been in the studios' bad graces—and vice versa—it seemed nothing more than a matter of personal history repeating itself.

Born in Dodge City, Kansas on May 17, 1936, Dennis Hopper has long been one of Hollywood's most combative—and talented—film figures. At eighteen he made his acting debut in *Rebel Without a Cause*, but two

movies later his reputation as a troublemaker on the set caused him to be blacklisted in Hollywood. Locked out of motion pictures, Hopper developed a passion for painting, becoming an authority on the Italian and Flemish Renaissances. Employable again eight years later, Hopper began appearing in exploitation films such as *The Trip*, in which he costarred with Peter Fonda. While Fonda was on a promotion tour in Canada for the movie, he telephoned Hopper in Los Angeles to suggest they make a film about two bikers who, after a big dope score, ride from California to Florida, there to retire on an orange farm; before they can, however, two duck poachers shoot them. The result, considerably refined, was *Easy Rider*.

While the film marked the highpoint of Hopper's professional fortunes, it also marked the end of his eight-year marriage to Brooke Hayward. Hopper's second marriage, not long after, to Michelle Phillips of The Mamas and The Papas, lasted all of five days. "I was lucky," Hopper recently told a journalist. "It could have lasted five years." In 1970, he met Daria Halprin, the darkly beautiful star of Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, at the Belgrade Film Festival in Yugoslavia, and less than two years later Hopper became a married man for the third time.

To interview the fiercely independent filmmaker, *Gallery* sent contributing editor Lawrence Linderman to visit Hopper at his home in Taos, New Mexico. Reports Linderman, "The disparity between Dennis Hopper's public image and private personality is nothing less than startling. In place of the violent, unstable, but gifted megalomaniac he's usually depicted as, I met an engaging, outgoing guy who seemed almost serene; Hopper reminds me very much of a couple of former boxers I've known who, having reached unexpectedly gratifying points in their lives, no longer regret a single moment spent in the ring. Dennis and Daria live in a small two-story adobe house set a few minutes outside of Taos on a huge expanse of Indian land. Hopper was an early collector of Pop Art, and the walls of the place are solidly lined with the work of Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Bruce Conner, and others, plus a good deal of Indian art as well. Daria keeps an electric percolator filled with coffee during the day, and after Hopper and I each poured a cup, we sat down in the living room to begin our conversation. *The Last Movie* was still very much on his mind, and provided a logical start for the interview:

**Gallery:** After *Easy Rider*, you were being hailed as Hollywood's most brilliant young director, yet in the wake of *The Last Movie*, it now appears as if no studio will trust you with a film. Are you bitter about that?

**Dennis Hopper:** It doesn't really bother me, because I expected it to happen the first time a film of mine stubbed its toe at the box office. I just didn't think it would happen with *The Last Movie*, which I thought was going to be a commercial success. What I do dislike is the impression I ripped off Universal International for a million dollars, which is what the film cost to make. I'm not the kind of artist who says, "I don't give a shit what I do with your money." I feel that if you do a painting, you should at least get back what the canvas and oils cost you. If you do the Sistine Chapel—not that I have with *The Last Movie*—you may not get the costs back the first year, but eventually enough people will see it and pay for it.

**Gallery:** Are you hoping that will be the case with your film?
**Hopper:** Right now I don't see how that's possible, but it's got the makings of a good story. First, though, let me say that I'm not worried about *The Last Movie* being around when most of today's films are in dust bins. If only because of the award it won in Venice, the picture will have to be looked at again. I made what I considered an artistic film and I take full responsibility for it, and that includes responsibility for its not being a commercial success at this point. I convinced Universal there was an audience for the picture, and now I'm not so sure that's true. But that doesn't mean there won't be an audience for it, which is where the good story comes in. Often enough, you'll see a *Citizen Kane* ten years after it was first released and had lost money, which was also true of *The Magnificent Ambersons*. I could probably run down a heavy list of films we now think of as classics but that no one ever saw when they first came out.

**Gallery:** You consider *The Last Movie* to be in the same category as *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*?
**Hopper:** I really do. I've looked at the film countless times, and I wouldn't change a thing in it. *The Last Movie* wasn't something I just happened to do after *Easy Rider*. I'd been thinking about the film and wanting to make it since 1965, when I wrote the screenplay.

**Gallery:** How did you originally get the idea for it?
**Hopper:** In '65, I went to Mexico to make a Western, *The Sons of Katie Elder*, with John Wayne. The sets for that movie were right in Durango, where people were actually living, and I started to wonder and fantasize about what would happen to the place after we left. People there would certainly relate to those sets and perhaps even start acting out the vio-

lence they saw taking place in front of the cameras. That was the original premise of *The Last Movie*, and I intended to film it in Durango. Instead, I wound up in Peru.

**Gallery:** What changed your mind?
**Hopper:** The Mexican government—they didn't like the screenplay at all. They thought I was making fun of the Indians, so they said I'd have to have a censor on the set and that I couldn't show children without shoes or in torn clothes—every kid was gonna have to look like a refugee from a Shirley Temple movie. I told 'em to forget it. But that brought up a real problem, because I wanted to do the movie in a country where I didn't speak the language, and I now had no idea of where to go. A friend of mine, a Mexican cameraman, advised me to go to Peru, and my first reaction to that was, "*Peru*? Man, like it's in the Amazon River, in the middle of a wet jungle, what the hell am I gonna do *there*?" But my great American knowledge of South America was overcome and we wound up filming there, in a little Indian mountain village called Chinchero. It was a beautiful and perfect setting for what I wanted to do.

**Gallery:** Which was?
**Hopper:** To make a movie about a very simple premise: What is reality? Well, reality for me was going to a foreign country that's still living in the 1870s, where people are still riding horses and living rather primitively. Now I'm gonna come on the scene with ultra-sophisticated movie equipment, build a Western town in the middle of their reality, and suddenly Chinchero's gonna look like Santa Fe used to, and I'm gonna make a violent Western there. And then I'm gonna split. And I'm also going to say in the film that these villagers are now going to start acting out the violence they saw in the Western, except their cameras are gonna be made of sticks, and when they reenact the violence they're not going to know how to fake it: they'll have themselves a ritual of real killing. Well, what's the local priest's involvement in all this going to be, and how is this gringo stunt man—who stays behind waiting for another movie to be made there—going to relate to it? What if the Indians choose *him* as the person they're gonna sacrifice? I then pull out the rug from under all of this by saying," Yeah, folks, but this is only a *movie*." I do that because it's just one more extension of reality, and if I don't, then I'd be lying, doing the very thing that I'm criticizing in the film. So, rather than killing the character I play at the end, I get up and stick my tongue out at the audience and say, "Fuck ya', I'm not going to die for you in this movie.

I'm not going to do that because that would defeat the film's purpose, and only contribute to your fantasies." In a sense, at the end I really *am* telling the audience to fuck off, and at the same time asking a simple question about how filmmakers are going to deal with the kind of control they have over audiences. What are we going to do with it? How are we going to use it?

**Gallery:** How strong do you think that control is?
**Hopper:** When you think of a filmmaker, picture a guy with a cigar who has money and who will either produce a movie or won't. Well, that guy with the cigar will make *any* kind of film if he thinks it'll make money, whether it's a black Dracula movie or *Shaft* or *Goldfinger* or Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch*. But those are all violent trips that leave everybody walking around thinking they're James Bond. And if they're not James Bond, everybody thinks they're John Wayne, that there's a good guy and a bad guy, and that the good guy can do anything he wants to the bad guy, including hitting him in the face with an axe handle, if he feels like it. If you see it in a movie, it *must* be okay, right? Then come the problems: If Duke Wayne can take the law into his own hands, why can't anybody else? Why can't Charles Manson? But if you really do some of the numbers Big Duke does in his films, you find out they're against the law—as they have to be. And I just think that our filmmakers have helped spread a mass mentality in which people honestly think there's nothing wrong with killing some guy if, say, you find out he's raped your wife. Forget the law, it's cool to kill him. And that's not just talk: the American movie audience is *there*.

**Gallery:** You sound as if you're down on both producers *and* audiences.
**Hopper:** Not really. I think there's a lot of people who wait a while before they see a new film and would've come out to see *The Last Movie*, but unfortunately studios don't think in terms of future business. They think in terms of two weeks in New York and how much are you grossing, and then they open for two weeks in Los Angeles, and when it doesn't do any business there they say, 'Hey, it's not making any money. Let us reedit it, let us change it around.' But I'd signed one of the heavier movie contracts of our time, and they couldn't change my film at all.

**Gallery:** Had Universal International been as unhappy with *The Last Movie* when they first saw it?
**Hopper:** Absolutely. They wanted me to kill off the character I played

no matter how I did it—whether I had a horse run over him or a camera fall on his head, they didn't care. Having decided they didn't like it, they also refused to pay my way to the Venice Film Festival, and didn't even want to let me take a print with me. But I insisted and paid my own way. When I got the prize and came back, they said, "We probably bought that for you," and when they found out they hadn't, they said, "Well, it doesn't mean a thing, anyway." And so they only budgeted $25,000 to open the picture in New York. To open *any* film in Manhattan reasonably well you need at least $50,000—for radio spots, newspaper ads and so on. You should have ads in the newspapers every day for at least a week before the film opens and then continue them every day during the first couple of weeks. For *The Last Movie*, Universal took out exactly one ad—on the day the picture opened. It broke box office records for the theater it opened in that day, but after that it didn't do any business at all. After two weeks of no business in New York and Los Angeles, the movie was shelved.

**Gallery:** What were the reasons Universal gave you for disliking your film?
**Hopper:** They said it made fun of the business and that the business was in bad enough shape as it is. They weren't too sure about it, but they also felt it was anti-American. In any case, they didn't want their name on the movie, so they decided not to release it in Europe or South America. And I found that really incredible; winning the Venice prize might not mean much here, but I think that in Europe it would. I would also think that if the film were shown in Peru, where it was made, people would come see it whether they walked out liking it or not.

**Gallery:** Why do you think Universal felt the movie was anti-American?
**Hopper:** They probably got uptight because it doesn't show the American in a very good light. Actually, it shows him as a loud-mouthed fool most of the time, which was something people didn't like, because they don't enjoy seeing themselves like that. It's a very personal film for people seeing it, whether they like it or not, and people sometimes got up infuriated and demanded their money back.

**Gallery:** Weren't most critics similarly unimpressed?
**Hopper:** Not in Europe, where the critics who saw it gave it fantastic reviews, some saying it was the best film ever made in America. Here, though, the reviewers laid me out. But most of the critics—like those on

the *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *New York Post*—didn't review the movie as much as they reviewed Dennis Hopper: what an egomaniac he was, how he drove to and from his retreat in a Jaguar, how he was a weekend acid mystic, etc. They also said things like how they hoped Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* was a promise. Well, none of that had to do with the picture, and it was as if they had never seen the film itself. And although a lot of the guys at Universal no doubt agreed with them, one of the heads of the studio who collects art told me, "Look, I'll give it to you that it's an artistic film, okay? But what do we have to do, *kill* you to make it successful? Art is something that's successful only after a guy's dead." I laughed and said, "Don't tell me that, I'm a paranoiac." But their attitude was, "Yeah, it's art, but art doesn't make money." Art, they feel, is Van Gogh cutting off his ear and then dying, which makes for a good story, after which people buy his paintings. Otherwise, art isn't something that's readily accepted by the public, and I'm inclined to agree.

**Gallery:** Perhaps that's true, yet when John Cassavetes made *Faces* on his own—which the studios hated—people responded to it, and the film made a great deal of money.
**Hopper:** But you're assuming that *Faces* is an art film. Cassavetes may feel that way, but *I* don't. I might as well include others in here as well—Bob Rafelson, Peter Bogdanovich, Cassavetes, I don't think there's anything in *any* of their films that's revolutionary, that hasn't been done before. Of all their films, the only one that was courageous—and which was a box office disaster—was Rafelson's *Head*, which did some really far out technical kinds of things. That doesn't mean that I didn't like *Faces*, *The Last Picture Show*, and *Five Easy Pieces*. I did, yet none of them contain things that haven't been done a million times before by directors like Howard Hawks, Joseph Mankiewicz, George Stevens, John Ford, and Henry Hathaway. As a matter of fact, those movies were going back to a 1940s concept of film as a human drama that says we go from here to there, that this will happen here and then we'll go on to the end.

**Gallery:** Do you think your own *Easy Rider* differed from that formula?
**Hopper:** I'm not saying *Easy Rider* was the most artistic film ever made, but those ride sequences contained a lot of things never before seen in a major feature film. And I was backcutting and direct cutting, when all the films of the day were superimposures, which I find rather banal. The point is, *Easy Rider* was innovative, and I don't think that the guys I've mentioned—Cassavetes, Rafelson, and Bogdanovich—are. If you use

painting as a comparison to movies in seeking a definition of what is art, I would just say that once you become a third-generation abstract expressionist painter you are no longer involved in art, you are only involved in the school of de Kooning, Motherwell, Gottlieb, Franz Kline, and perhaps Pollock. Art, however, is something immediate, art is a fresh and new idea, and if you draw a hand, the hand's got to be holding something different. Art is involved in evolution and once it bogs down and you become imitative of a master, well, you're imitative of a master, period. You're no longer inventing anything, you're no longer contributing to the evolution of your art.

**Gallery:** As far as film, though, you seem to be talking about what really do seem like technical innovations.
**Hopper:** First of all, I don't use any technical trips in my camera. And, in editing, I don't superimpose—I don't lay one image over another—I just direct cut. But yes, innovating technically would have to be part of it and so would editing. What it finally comes down to is that art, whether it's painting or assembling or taking photographs or making films, is doing something that is *yours*. And not doing something Howard Hawks did in 1940. Today's directors are emulating *Grapes of Wrath*, *Citizen Kane*, and several other films of the past. They're doing a traditional story, and the simpler they tell it, the better. That's fine as far as it goes, but to suddenly say that these are great filmmakers? I disagree. I think they have tremendous technique, but it's not even their own technique. That doesn't leave them as creative artists—it leaves them as imitators. They're not creating art like *Last Year at Marienbad*, *8 1/2*, or any work comparable to Bergman's films, even if we go way back to *The Seventh Seal*.

**Gallery:** Why do you think films of that nature are rarely attempted America?
**Hopper:** Because our directors are involved in giving the American movie audience what it wants to see. And America doesn't want to see *Last Year at Marienbad*, not really, nor does it want to see *8 1/2*. Oh, there may be a select group that'll go see them—given the right amount of publicity and the fact they think they *should* see them—but that doesn't mean even 5 percent of the audience is gonna come close to understanding those films. Instead, a great deal of their enjoyment will be on the level of, "Wow, isn't he far-out!" And it's sometimes much easier to understand a *European* being far-out. No, people just want to see a strong, sentimental, or rapidly paced drama that will take them out of today's

reality. It's not the Depression, maybe, it's not quite anywhere yet, but people don't want to even think about it too hard. All they want to go to the theatre for is to forget, to see escapist, opiate films—which is why people started going to movies in the thirties. Really, there isn't an audience in this country that wants to see anything beyond an entertainment film.

**Gallery:** Does that mean your own movies will be different in the future?
**Hopper:** As far as the films I make are concerned, I don't think I'm going to get away from an aesthetic trip unless I feel the subject is something that should really be told straight and simple. At the same time, though, I enjoy seeing good entertainment films. I don't see that many movies anymore, but a recent one that I liked a lot was *The Godfather*.

**Gallery:** Would you direct films like that if they were offered to you?
**Hopper:** I'd want to act in them, but as far as my own filmmaking, no. Look, I really dig the work of people like Eisenstein, Renoir, Ford, Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, and Godard. You look at their films and something's always happening, they're always showing you new things, and that's what I want to do as a director. Yeah, I want to direct, but I want to direct my own movies, and it's going to be difficult for me to get financing because of *The Last Movie*. If I can come up with another *Easy Rider* story it probably won't be a problem, but if I have an aesthetic trip that looks as if it might be a commercial sequel to *The Last Movie*, well, forget it. Right now it seems to me the best way I can put together money to make my films is to act in entertaining movies and save up enough to finance them myself. So at this point I want to begin building a name for myself as an actor, which is something I really haven't done.

**Gallery:** Do you think your acting skills haven't been recognized?
**Hopper:** I don't see how they could have been. *Easy Rider* is the only film I had a major role in that's had wide exposure. And it's weird, but people identify me with Billy, the character I played. People really walk around thinking Dennis Hopper *is* that cat they saw in *Easy Rider*—and I'm not.

**Gallery:** What are the main differences between you and Billy of *Easy Rider*?
**Hopper:** I'm just not a Gabby Hayes–Ward Bond type of guy who's al-

ways shouting. "We gotta keep movin', let's get goin'." I'm much quieter than that and much more sensitive to situations than Billy was. To me, it was just an acting job.

**Gallery:** Peter Fonda, your cycle-riding buddy in the film, has stated that he feels you gave the best acting performance in *Easy Rider*. Do you agree?
**Hopper:** I don't know about that, because as the director of the film I was trying to be very, very fair to Peter and to make him the star of the film. My idea was to show him as an aesthetic guy—looking into the light, touching a leaf, and so on—while keeping his lines down to a minimum so he'd become a strong, silent Gary Cooper–type dude with a lot of mystery going for himself. That was a part I'd much rather have played than Billy, the loud speed freak. Peter, of course, is a star and a very good actor; he was really fine in *Easy Rider*, and so was Jack Nicholson. Which was funny, because his was the only role I didn't cast—and I didn't want Jack to play the part.

**Gallery:** Who did you want instead?
**Hopper:** A real guy who'd played football in Texas. I'd always known Jack was talented, but when I was casting *Easy Rider*, I didn't see him as a Southerner at all. Bert Schneider, the film's producer, hadn't asked me for a thing in the way of decisions on the movie, so when he wanted Nicholson I went along with it. I'm glad now that I did, believe me. Since then, of course, Jack's been in several big films, but after *Easy Rider* the only one I made was *The Last Movie*, which no one saw, so I don't feel people think of me as an actor—which is really what I was and what I am.

**Gallery:** Are there any kinds of roles you especially want to play?
**Hopper:** Specifically? I really don't know. I just did a film called *Dime Box, Texas* with Peter Boyle, Ben Johnson, and Warren Oates, a social comedy about a one-horse town at the turn of the century, and I enjoyed it. I guess I don't have any set ideas about parts I *won't* play, either, because I think an actor should be able to function in any role he's cast—and that he should always try to be better than his material. I think you'll find that a good actor can take shit and turn it into gold, and if it's gold to begin with, he'll turn it into purer gold. At the same time, he, too, should be concerned with advancing his art. Dustin Hoffman, for instance, is an excellent actor who's always trying new things. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't, but he's always experimenting.

**Gallery:** Does returning to acting in other people's films represent any kind of demotion to you?
**Hopper:** No, it just seems like a way of securing a place for myself. If I'm going to continue to act in my own films, films that I'll write and direct, I would like to think people will want to see Dennis Hopper act. Audiences don't care who's written or directed a film nearly as much as who's up there on the screen, so to give my own movies a better shot, I'm going to have to start working in a lot more films than I have.

**Gallery:** Isn't the reason you've appeared in so few movies attributable to your being *persona non grata* at Hollywood studios almost since you started your acting career?
**Hopper:** Yes, it is. The first two pictures I acted in I did with James Dean, and he had a tremendous effect on me. Jimmy was a Method actor who'd studied with Strasberg, as I did, and he really believed acting was the most important thing in life. And that bullshit directors were not going to tell him what to do, except for Elia Kazan, who was a Method director—and even he and Kazan had fights on *East of Eden*.

**Gallery:** What was the advantage of doing that?
**Hopper:** Jimmy would come on the set and literally give everybody the finger and make them his enemy—and then he wouldn't have to hear from the grips about how James Cagney would have played that scene or listen to all the advice a young actor would have to stand still for from the crew. Also, he'd been an extra when he was a student at UCLA, and he'd gotten nothing but rotten treatment from movie people during that time. His approach was to shut the door, don't bother with anyone, don't waste your time and energy coping with those kinds of trips: just get down to work, because the work was the important thing. In the morning when he'd come to work, you could say. "Hello, Jimmy," and he'd walk right by you. But it wasn't that he was ignoring you, he was already into his trip. And he took it very, very seriously. On the set of *Giant*, he told George Stevens, the director, that he sometimes stayed up all night preparing for a scene scheduled to be shot the next day, and if Stevens didn't shoot it that day it was a day Jimmy had prepared for and was missing. And so for every day he was supposed to work and didn't, Jimmy was going to take a day off. He told Stevens he was using his senses and his emotions and that he wasn't going to be treated as a machine they could just turn on or off anytime they wanted to. He really had the courage of his convictions.

**Gallery:** Did the two of you become close friends?
**Hopper:** It wasn't a buddy-buddy hang-out thing, if that's what you mean, because he didn't have that relationship going with anyone. But he knew that I was really interested in acting and film, and it became sort of like student to teacher between me and Jimmy. He was twenty-four and I was eighteen when we met making *Rebel Without a Cause*. I was very competitive as far as acting was concerned, and I really didn't understand what Dean was doing; I'd never seen anyone work that realistically and with that much imagination. One night on the "chickie run" in *Rebel*, I grabbed him and threw him into a car and said, "Like, I want to know what you're doing. 'Cause look, I can't even *understand* what you're doing." And so he explained how he worked.

**Gallery:** Was it complicated?
**Hopper:** It was really simple, man. He just told me to do something and not to show it. He said, "If you're smoking a cigarette, smoke the cigarette and don't *act* smoking a cigarette. If somebody knocks on a door and comes in and has a gun in his hand, you don't have a big, quick reaction; you turn, you have to see the guy, then the gun, and *then* you know what's happening, and maybe you get up to tell a joke and dive out the window or whatever. But you have to do something and not show it." In the beginning it suddenly becomes very difficult to smoke a cigarette or drink a cup of coffee when you're conscious of it and don't want to be, but pretty soon you can break through and get on to other things. Jimmy started to watch me act without me knowing it, and he'd come and tell me when he thought I was good and when he thought I wasn't. He taught me a lot.

**Gallery:** Was Dean as emotionally disturbed as the press made him out to be?
**Hopper:** Jimmy had emotional problems, but he would justify them as part of his work. For example, in Texas one time he was doing an outdoor scene in *Giant* with Elizabeth Taylor and he was very nervous. About five thousand people were roped off one hundred yards away from the cameras, and they'd come from all over Texas to see Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor, because nobody knew who James Dean was at that point. And he was kind of shaky, because this was his first scene with Elizabeth Taylor. Suddenly, while the cameras were rolling, he just walked off about halfway to the people, pulled out his cock and pissed. And then went back and played the scene. When we were driving back that night I

told him, "I try to justify everything you do, man, but that's getting a little far out, you know?" And Jimmy said, "Look, I was nervous, I couldn't do the scene, and you can't work with your senses when you're nervous. I had to pee and I figured if I could do it in front of all those people then I could come back and do *anything* in front of that camera." He got the scene in one take, incidentally.

**Gallery:** What effect did Dean's death have on you?
**Hopper:** An incredible one. I just couldn't believe it. I was very hung up on Napoleon and people like that and ideas like destiny and similar trips young guys sometimes go through—and I just couldn't understand how Jimmy Dean could die at age twenty-four. It was really a heavy number and screwed me up for years afterwards. He was the most talented guy I've ever seen, and I mean in every area; Jimmy was a talented writer, a talented sculptor, a talented actor—there didn't seem to be *anything* he couldn't do. After Jimmy died it was as if somebody who'd been protecting me was gone—I was on my own now and had my own fights. It had been a lot easier when Jimmy was alive for me to stand up to a George Stevens and say, "Hey look, I'm gonna do this scene my way." He'd say, "You been watchin' that *Dean* again! You guys are screwin' me up!" But once there wasn't a Dean around I had to go through the whole trip, what he went through. It's common knowledge, you know, that if Kazan hadn't used Dean for *East of Eden* we wouldn't have seen Jimmy act, because by then the movies didn't want him and he'd been blackballed on Broadway and on television. I'd already made a start in that direction myself; I was blacklisted at one studio before I'd ever been in a movie.

**Gallery:** Which one?
**Hopper:** Columbia Pictures. That was the result of an interview I had with Harry Cohn, one of the last of the old-style movie tycoons. I was eighteen then, and had come to Los Angeles only a few months before hoping to break into pictures. At the time, and until I met James Dean, there was no question in my mind that I was the best actor in America. When I was fourteen, I was playing Shakespeare at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego and did that until I was eighteen and graduated from high school. Anyway, when I got to L.A., I tested for the role of an epileptic on a *Medic* TV episode, got it, and when the show was televised on January 5, 1955, five studios wanted to sign me to a contract. I was asked to see Cohn at Columbia, and I was nervous as hell when I met him. He started telling me what a realistic actor he thought I was, and then he asked me

what I'd done before *Medic*. When I told him about the Shakespeare, he said, "My God, I didn't realize that. Well, I'll have to send you to school for six months to take all the Shakespeare out of you. I thought you were realistic, but obviously I made a mistake." At that point I stopped sweating, stopped looking at a crack in the ceiling, and told Harry Cohn to go fuck himself. He banned me, and the first time I ever worked at Columbia was when I came off the road with *Easy Rider* and edited it there.

**Gallery:** By the time *Giant* appeared, you'd gotten a reputation as a bright young talent—and also as a troublemaker who enjoyed feuding with motion picture studio brass.
**Hopper:** I don't know who was feuding with who, but I was banned from all the big studios right after that for eight years.

**Gallery:** Why?
**Hopper:** For being difficult. In a picture I did for Henry Hathaway, *From Hell to Texas*, I walked off the set three times. Hathaway insisted on giving me every line reading and every gesture, and you can't work in a Method way like that. The first thing you learn in Method acting is that the lines aren't the important thing, it's whether you're feeling something or not, and not the way the words are coming out. And you certainly don't do conscious gesture trips—they're supposed to be coming out of you and not something you've preconceived. Hathaway, though, wouldn't let me act that way, and I'd fought him all through the picture. Finally, it was my last day of shooting, and my last scene was a ten line thing. I came on the set and Hathaway, pointing to a few stacks of film cans, said, "You know what those are? I have enough film in those cans to work for a month. We don't have to go to lunch or dinner or anything, because I own 40 percent of this studio. We're just going to sit here until you do this scene exactly as I tell you. Every word is going to be read the way I want it read, and every gesture is going to be done the way I want it done. This is your last scene, and you can end your career right here or we can get it on the first take. Now this is the way I want it. . . ."

He began reading every line the way he wanted me to deliver it. Which I refused to do. I'd been loaned out to 20th Century-Fox by Warner Bros., and a couple of dozen takes later Jack Warner had been called to the set—and was giving me advice: "What the hell are you doing? *Do* the goddam scene! Are you crazy? What are you ruining your career for?" But I just kept it up. There were about seventy-eight takes, and I did them seventy-eight different ways. Finally, after eight hours of that, I broke down and

asked Hathaway to tell me again how he wanted it played. I did it, walked out, and didn't work in a major studio again for eight years.

**Gallery:** Did you hold Hathaway to blame for your being blacklisted?
**Hopper:** All I can tell you is that I went from wanting to kill Henry Hathaway to really wanting to work for him again. I got to thinking that the only way I could hurt him would be to act in one of his films and do *everything* he said. And what's still strange to me is that eight years later Hathaway asked for me and hired me to play a similar kind of part in *The Sons of Katie Elder*. But by then I understood his film technique and realized the man knows what he's doing but has no idea of how to tell you about it. I'd become a student of Hathaway's films after our run-in, and after watching them I noticed something: Hathaway never moves his camera. He almost always uses stationary shots. And what he can't explain is that because his camera doesn't move, the actor must. I also realized, when I saw *From Hell to Texas*, that I was the worst thing in the movie. I may have been doing the best work, but it was completely out of context with the rest of the film, and I wound up thinking I should have fitted into it. Eight years later, Hathaway calls me in like nothing's happened and says. "I got this part and I know you can do it. Of course, this is with Big Duke, and Big Duke doesn't like any of that Method shit." I said "Mr. Hathaway, you won't have to worry about that." And he answered, "I'm not worried, boy, I just know Big Duke doesn't like that Method shit." John Wayne, by the way, is a nice guy as long as you don't talk politics or mention the name Eldridge Cleaver. Anyway, I was in the first scene on the first day of shooting, did everything Hathaway told me to, and got it the first take. Hathaway came up to me afterwards, a cigar hanging out of his mouth and tears in his eyes, grabbed me and said, "That was great, boy, really great!" said, "Well, you see, Mr. Hathaway, I'm a much better actor now than I was eight years ago." And still filled with emotion, he said, "You're not better, boy—you're *smarter*!" Which was like really strange, but now I love the old man.

**Gallery:** How difficult was it to accept your eight-year exile from Hollywood?
**Hopper:** There were times when it got to me, of course, but when I saw I couldn't get any acting work I started to get involved in photography; I carried a 35mm camera practically everywhere I went. And I think I did almost everything with it I'd ever wanted to do, from shooting fashion stuff for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* to photographing crumbling walls,

peace marches in the South with Martin Luther King, riots on Sunset Strip, and hippie love-ins. Since I've begun making movies again I don't really take photographs any more, and while I'd sort of like to get into it again, I know I don't really have any great desire to. Sometimes, though, I'll be driving down a country road and see an old gas station and think, wow, I'd like to have a photograph of that. I won't have my camera with me so I don't stop, but I think about it—and at this point, to me, thinking about a photograph is as good as taking it. I guess a good part of my interest in photography was proving that I could do it, because I did it at a time when I had no other creative release except to write screenplays that might never be produced. During those years I was also involved in art, so I kept pretty busy. Still, I lost a lot of time, and that hurt.

**Gallery:** When you again reappeared on the screen, you quickly became a kind of dope culture hero, initially through your roles in *The Trip* and *Easy Rider*, and later on because of the many press reports of your cocaine usage on the set of *The Last Movie*.
**Hopper:** Right, there was cocaine around, because a lot of cocaine comes from Peru, and there was also a lot of grass around. One of those press reports you just mentioned bugged me, and that was *Life* magazine's, which inferred that I've shot heroin—and that's complete bullshit. I have openly admitted that I've smoked, dropped, and sniffed, but I've never shot anything, and I really resented that.

**Gallery:** Yet you've testified before the New Mexico legislature in favor of legalizing heroin. Why?
**Hopper:** Because around 80 percent of the crime in major cities is committed by people looking to steal something so they can pay for a fix. In the face of that fact, it's logical to me that rather than beefing up police departments we can cut crime more effectively by giving heroin to addicts at drug stores—and controlling the amount to make sure we're not giving them anything extra to sell. That would keep addicts from stealing your television, mugging and maybe even killing you. And it would be taken care of on a doctor-patient relationship, because addicts are sick people. Also, legalizing heroin would cut out tremendous money that the underworld is making—tax free money, part of which should be helping the society out. At the very least, by legalizing heroin, we'd stop financing organized crime while also dropping the crime rate way down.

**Gallery:** A number of politicians have commented that such a "permis-

sive" approach would only result in more heroin addicts. Do you disagree?

**Hopper:** I don't see how standing in line at a drug store waiting for your heroin is going to look glamorous, do you? Why would *anyone* want to be addicted? You know, people talk about marijuana and say addicts start with marijuana and it leads to harder stuff, and that's right. The only reason that's right, though, is because the dealer you get marijuana from can't make much money on it—but he can if he gets you addicted to heroin. *That's* how people get hooked.

**Gallery:** Is that a theory of yours or have you actually seen it happen?

**Hopper:** A lot of people I used to know died from overdoses of heroin. They didn't start on it because marijuana led them to heroin, but because the guy who was selling them grass was also a connection for heroin. Like, they were stoned one time or the situation was such where the guy told 'em, "Try this once," and zap!, they were hooked. But I can't believe marijuana itself leads to heroin because I've seen too many people, including myself, who smoke grass and never touch harder stuff. And compared to what it costs this nation in terms of theft, pain, murder, and misery, giving heroin away would be cheap at twice what it will cost which won't be very much: The price of heroin is outrageously expensive *only* because it's illegal. There's one more practical thing to consider about this, and I wish the politicians would keep it in mind: If such a thing as a free society is going to exist, then you have to put up with the fact that if some people are going to want heroin, they're going to find a way to get it. Keeping heroin illegal not only breeds more addicts, it also creates some fantastic other problems for the society to deal with.

**Gallery:** Such as?

**Hopper:** For one thing, we've got all these guys coming back from Vietnam, where they've been getting heroin—pure heroin—and really heavy marijuana and hashish. They come back home, we've trained them as soldiers to be killers—and immediately upon returning they're criminals. What would you say the percentage is of soldiers in Vietnam who use marijuana? It's enormous—and they're now outlaws. Well, if a person becomes a criminal and has to sneak around to get marijuana, then it's very easy for him to be influenced by kind of underground newspaper or political movement that wants to legalize marijuana—but God knows what else they're advocating. I just don't believe you can keep a society together in which you make the majority of your citizens

criminals, and right, I believe at least 50 percent of the people in this country have smoked marijuana. It's no longer the hippie on the corner, and it hasn't been that way for some time. Grass is used by executives in every business, and socially it's the smart, hip thing to do. Candidly, even most of your politicians will tell you they've tried it.

**Gallery:** Then why are they so against its legalization?
**Hopper:** Because politicians are elected and worry that the majority of people won't vote for them if they come out in favor of legalizing grass. Politicians also know that the kids who use marijuana and heroin aren't the ones who go out and vote; more likely, they'll just be turning on come election day. There's one more really important reason, which is that we've signed a pact with the United Nations saying the United States will not legalize marijuana. Government leaders around the world, you see, are worried that if their people smoke dope it will lead to the decline and fall of their nations. Usually, they point to India when they say that, but how is marijuana responsible for a society screwed up by a massive overpopulation, a society in which people are starving because there just isn't any work? I'll tell you this, the people *I* know who smoke marijuana are very creative and if they want to do something they *do* it. Getting high on grass doesn't mean you can't work or you don't want to work or that you don't want to use your hands or your mind. It's just the opposite. And it's not at all like liquor—where you suddenly can't drive a car, walk a straight line, or even touch your nose.

**Gallery:** Would you also want to legalize cocaine?
**Hopper:** I can't see why not. I've sniffed cocaine, really enjoyed it, and never found it addictive or that I had to have it. There was plenty of it in Peru because cocaine is as available down there as salt is up here. People in Peru are really funny about it too: The only time they use coke is when they get drunk; it sobers them up and they take it so they can drink some more. Coke is only a mild upper, and an expensive one, too. Until just a couple of years back, I don't know of anybody who thought it would ever be sold on the streets, as it now is.

**Gallery:** Why do you think that came about?
**Hopper:** Partially, I suppose, because of *Easy Rider*. Peter and I had hit upon the idea of these two guys scoring dope, hiding it in the gas tanks of their motorcycles, and then riding across the country to sell it in New Orleans. We had to decide what kind of dope the characters would be

smuggling, and marijuana was out—like how much grass can you carry on a motorcycle, what kind of score is that? I argued with Peter that we didn't want to use heroin because that's a bummer, and that if we use coke, well, nobody but rich people can afford to use it, anyway—it used to be called the drug of kings—so nobody's really gonna get too down on us for that. We had some big arguments over it, because cocaine wasn't really being used much then and heroin seemed more realistic to Peter, but finally he gave in. And very soon after *Easy Rider* came out, coke started appearing on the streets.

**Gallery:** Are you still heavily into drugs?
**Hopper:** Not any more. I probably smoke about three joints a week, and I usually do them all at once. Basically, because grass isn't that much of a trip. Beyond that, I haven't taken acid or mescaline in over a year. It's not that I have anything against them, just that I don't feel the necessity to do it. Actually, it's something I never even think about, one way or the other.

**Gallery:** That's quite a contrast with the well-documented picture America has of you, don't you think?
**Hopper:** Sure it is, but I was using a lot more drugs then. A few years ago I wouldn't *think* of going through a day without smoking at least eight joints. And I thought I was handling them beautifully, and I probably was; I sure didn't feel like I was stoned out of my head all the time. I stopped smoking grass all day when I started making movies, because there wasn't enough time to do it. You just can't be around state police all the time—as we were when we were on the road shooting *Easy Rider*—and do a lot of grass. On *Easy Rider*, I think there was more smoking in front of the cameras then behind 'em. Really, even finding the time to roll one was a hassle, because I get very intense about work when I'm doing a movie.

**Gallery:** Was your sudden lack of lay-around time the reason you also got off LSD?
**Hopper:** Nope. I stopped because it was a thing like, my God, how much acid can you do before your mind goes completely bananas? More seriously, I'd never had the desire to drop acid in the first place.

**Gallery:** Then why'd you do it?
**Hopper:** To have a kind of religious ego experience, and believe me, I

really had some on acid. But it wasn't anything I did for pleasure. Like, I never dropped and then went out to parties—I couldn't even *imagine* taking acid and then going out into the world, it would be an enormous bummer. I've done it, a couple of times after I started coming down, but even then I couldn't handle that scene. In fact, taking acid was never something I thought of on a level of being able to "handle" it. When I dropped I'd do something private, like go up to a mountain somewhere, or get in bed with my old lady.

**Gallery:** How did you get started on LSD?
**Hopper:** The first time I dropped acid was after Peter had made *The Wild Angels* and got me the part of the connection in *The Trip*. I decided that if I was going to be a guy who was selling acid and talking about it, I was going to have to try it—that's just my conditioning as a Method actor. So I took it, had a very far-out experience, and that was the first time I'd used psychedelics in about fifteen years—when I was fourteen I'd taken peyote and the magic mushroom with Indians in a controlled situation. Actually, I was very late dropping acid; Peter and his friends had dropped way before. I don't think I ever took it more than a dozen times, although that might be an underestimate, but not by too much. I really drink much more than I do drugs, and I try to cut down on that. I drink quite a bit of beer and I like to have a couple of drinks at lunch, but I don't have any hard liquor in the house. Because I can just get outrageous.

**Gallery:** You have a reputation of being something of a barroom brawler; do you get into many fights?
**Hopper:** Not as many as I could, that's for sure. I've been in my share, but I don't go out looking for fights, and I don't start them. I really don't.

**Gallery:** Do people just come up to you and want to fight?
**Hopper:** You're laughing, but it can get into that. And has, several times. Somebody'll come up to me, overly friendly and wanting to be a buddy, and pretty soon that starts to be a hostile trip—sometimes without the guy being aware of it. Because of things like his own economic pressures and where he thinks I am that way, he'll start getting pushy and aggressive to the point where I'll say, "Hey, wait a second. Can't we just have a drink without that?" And then he'll come back with a line like, "You're pretty tough in the movies, but I bet you're not *really* so tough." And af-

ter that the guy takes a swing and there I am, in a fight. It doesn't happen too much anymore, but it happened a lot when I first came to Taos. The whole *macho* trip was very heavy here.

**Gallery:** What brought you to Taos in the first place?
**Hopper:** I came when I was looking for locations for *Easy Rider*, and I really fell in love with the town. Of the six weeks we shot across country, two were spent in Taos. I edited *Easy Rider* in Hollywood, and didn't dig that at all, so when I returned from Peru with *The Last Movie*, I came back to Taos. But when got here it was almost like a revolution was going on. Not a revolution, maybe, but the hippies and all the commune people were really being pushed around by the Chicanos and Spanish.

**Gallery:** Did your arrival cause any changes?
**Hopper:** Only that I immediately started asking questions about what was going on and went to the authorities to complain. I got nowhere.

**Gallery:** Did more kids begin coming to Taos when they learned you'd moved here?
**Hopper:** No. There were people in town thinking it was going to happen, but it didn't, although there were already thirteen communes around Taos by then. Kids weren't coming because the word was out about the violence here. Stories about it had been published in the *Village Voice*, the *L.A. Free Press*, and *The Realist*, all warning people to stay away.

**Gallery:** Exactly what kind of incidents were taking place?
**Hopper:** It was rape-your-local-hippie time and get away with it—get away with it because everybody knows that longhairs are just animals who run around naked and take drugs. Really, it was all right to beat up on the guys and screw their old ladies and never worry about the law, since the law seemed to feel that way about the hippies, too. Besides, the longhairs are Anglos, and the Indians, Chicanos, and Spanish don't want Taos to go Anglo the way Santa Fe did, and before it, Albuquerque.

**Gallery:** Have you been involved in any of those kinds of incidents since coming to Taos?
**Hopper:** Yeah, I got into a hassle one day when I was out driving with two people and we asked directions of six guys we saw on the road. It

didn't start in because they knew I was Dennis Hopper, only because they saw three guys with long hair in a car, and so the six of 'em tried to grab us and pull us out. A citizen's arrest was made.

**Gallery:** They brought you in to jail?
**Hopper:** No, we brought *them* in!

**Gallery:** Three against six? How'd you do that?
**Hopper:** Right out of the movies, man. I knocked a kid out, and another guy in the car knocked a kid out—and it was over very quick. I told them to line up against the fence, waited for the cops to come, and held them at gunpoint.

**Gallery:** At what point did the gun come out?
**Hopper:** After I'd knocked the guy out and told them to line up. It was a .38 revolver and it's legal for me to have as long as it's uncovered—which it was, in the back seat of the car. But we were about twenty miles out of town, and before the police could get there, word about what was happening had spread all over the area. In a few minutes it looked like a scene out of *Viva Zapata*: suddenly, between forty to sixty vehicles arrived, loaded up with farmers carrying hoes, pitchforks, and shovels—and coming at us. I pointed the gun at all of them and said something like, "Get back, man, I'm taking these guys in and this shit's gonna stop right now!" Finally, the police arrived, took us all into jail, let the six guys go—and then booked me and my brother! And meanwhile, the six guys' brothers, most of them just back from Vietnam, came into the jail and told me, "We're going to kill you, man. You're dead." So I turned to the police sergeant and said, "Sergeant, these guys just said they're gonna kill me." The sergeant looks at me like I'm an idiot and says, "Shut up. This is a lynch situation and we only have six police here. Get out by the back door—you're out on $8,000 bail and you'd better have it posted by tomorrow morning." But since then, there hasn't been any more violence against hippies.

**Gallery:** What was so attractive about Taos that you'd come here in spite of the town's crusade against longhairs?
**Hopper:** Taos is sacred. That may be a strange word to use, but I really believe in the magic here, and the vibes that I get, and the mountain. According to the Tibetans, Taos is one of the seven sacred mountains in the world. The ashes of D. H. Lawrence are buried right next to Taos

mountain, on Lama Mountain. Nobody knows how those mountains got their names, although Taos in Chinese is Daos, which means "the ways." People see different meanings in that, just as they see different magical aspects of Taos itself. Edgar Cayce, for instance, never visited the town, but he once said that if you're in Taos between 1970 and 1976, you would have the opportunity of looking at the whole world as if you were seeing it through a microscope. Well, the population here is a mixture of three cultures—Spanish, Anglo, and Indian—each with its own power structures and each with hassles between them. To me, it's rather interesting to see what goes on here and then see that what's going on in the world today is really similar. Anyway, Taos got to me, and the success of *Easy Rider* enabled me to come back and buy a house.

**Gallery:** Which you're not living in.
**Hopper:** Right, I moved out. I bought a huge adobe house that was built fifty years ago by Mabel Dodge, the heiress to the Dodge fortune, after she'd married Tony Luhan, the son of the chief of the Pueblo Indians. The house has ten bedrooms, five baths, and three living rooms, and Mabel, a socialist who wanted to start an art colony here, invited a lot of writers and painters to come visit her and Tony. D. H. Lawrence lived in the house for a while, then got a place of his own and stayed in Taos for five years.

**Gallery:** Why'd you move out?
**Hopper:** Well, when I first got it, the house had a purpose: I was editing *Easy Rider* along with three other editors and their wives and two kids, and my brother, the associate editor of the film, and his wife and two kids. There was a function for it then, but not now, so last summer an art extension class from Southern Methodist University took it over. At the moment, a local rock group is in there, ten kids, living together and rehearsing, which is a good function for the house. If just me and Daria, my wife, were living there, I wouldn't be comfortable.

**Gallery:** Because of its size?
**Hopper:** Yeah, it's too big for only two people. I really love it as a work of art, as a piece of sculpture, rather than as a place to live. And, on another level, I feel very guilty about having things that don't really function. I mean, I don't need a house where I'm gonna hire twenty servants and live on a bunch of pillows. It's the same thing with cars. I've been driving a Jeep for some time, but Daria, who's pregnant, has been wanting me to

get a car. So, I just bought a three-year-old Lincoln Continental and it's fun trying to figure out how to work all the buttons, and I'm like a kid in my enjoyment of it. But at the same time there's a part of me saying, what the hell are you doing with a car like this? Hell, when I have to drive the 120 miles to Albuquerque to catch a plane, the ride is a lot more comfortable in the Lincoln than in the Jeep. But part of me says, yeah, but what are people going to think about you riding in that car? And I know that kind of thing is never really going to change with me even if I make millions. Like, I'm still gonna feel guilty if I go to New York to promote a movie and I'm driven around in a Cadillac. And you better believe it's convenient; they pick you up at the airport, drive you in and then get you to your ten interviews that day on time. Just the same, I would like to be invisible every time I get in and out of it, because it embarrasses me, and I always hope nobody can see me doing a number with a Cadillac and a chauffeur. The big house I bought is sort of like that, too, which is one of the reasons I moved out.

**Gallery:** On the other hand, does it ever seem strange that here you are, a movie star, paying all of $125 a month rent?
**Hopper:** Only when you put it like that. Otherwise, I can't imagine being able to get a house like this, on 8 1/2 acres, in New York or Los Angeles or any of the big cities without paying five times as much. Right now, this place is fine for me and Daria; it's a two-bedroom house and if we have five children, maybe then the big house will again have a purpose for me. The great thing about this place, though, is that I figure I can always lose the big house, but God, I'm really gonna have to be in trouble if I can't come up with $125 a month rent.

**Gallery:** Do you miss not living in a big city?
**Hopper:** No. Let me put it to you this way: I've always felt that people who live in a big city—especially if they've been born there—learn quickly that life there is always involved in learning how to handle rip-offs, and that the city is constantly throwing new ones at you. That doesn't mean that people in a town like Taos aren't ripping other people off; they are. But the big difference it that life here is on a personal level and even the rip-offs never become abstraction because you know everybody involved. If somebody O.D.'s here, there's a good chance you know him, as well as the guy who sold him the heroin. If somebody's murdered here you know him and you can probably figure out who did him in. If somebody in town wins an Olympic medal, like Frank Shorter

did in Munich, you know him, too. Taos and every small town has the same problems every big city has, except they're not abstractions—and by that, I mean that if you're living in a New York apartment house and somebody's murdered out front you probably have no idea who the guy is, it doesn't really touch your life. In New York, you don't really know the whore who lives down the hall from you, either. Here, you do.

**Gallery:** Does it seem odd to you that your comparison of small towns to big cities revolves almost exclusively around murders, O.D.'s, and assorted other vices?
**Hopper:** Considering the incredible amount of crime in America, I don't find that odd at all. In *Easy Rider*, one of the main points I tried to get across is that we are a nation of criminals, that we have always *admired* the criminal. Go back in our history and all you see America doing is making heroes out of people like Billy the Kid, Jesse James, the Daltons, Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, and Bonnie and Clyde. Our country can even admire two guys who smuggle cocaine in from Mexico and ride motorcycles across the U.S. to sell it—and can also admire the two guys who shoot them.

**Gallery:** What gives you that impression?
**Hopper:** I saw those two reactions to the movie. At the end of a showing in Los Angeles, people got up and screamed, "Kill the pigs." And in New Orleans, people actually began applauding the guys who shot us. Both reactions bothered me, because I wasn't trying to solicit either one. I was trying to say to the riders, "Hey, you guys, you got all your money in a gas tank with an American flag on it—and you better watch out, 'cause it's gonna blow up right in your faces." I wasn't saying they were good guys or bad guys, and neither was I saying the people in that restaurant scene were good guys or bad guys. The statement I was making was that all these people are human beings and look how fucked up they are. On both sides! People whose purpose in life is to just go for the money—and that seems to be everybody in America—well, what is that? What kind of a dream have we instilled in ourselves? Why have we decided that money is the most important thing in life and allowed our whole country to be run on that principle? Because it is, you know. And why do we still revere the criminal, especially the successful criminal? If a guy's smuggling cocaine and gets away with it he's a hero. But if he gets caught he's an asshole. And that applies to the guys who shoot the riders off their bikes; if they do it and get away with it, they're heroes. If they

get caught, then *they're* assholes. That philosophy really puzzles me, and people may argue it isn't the American philosophy at all, but it sure looks that way from where I sit.

**Gallery:** You really think the entire nation is into that?
**Hopper:** If they yell "Kill the pigs" in Los Angeles and applaud the murderers in New Orleans, it's one or the other, and both sides are the same. I simply feel that we live in a society that upholds the criminal on almost every level. I mean, if you can cheat on your income taxes, terrific. If you don't have to pay any taxes; all the better. And if you can smuggle some of that money out of the country and into Swiss banks, fantastic. If you get caught, you're an asshole. But how long can a society last when like the big thing is to cheat the government? Not *back* the government, not *change* the government if you don't dig it, just *cheat* it.

**Gallery:** Don't you think a lot of people really feel the government *should* be cheated?
**Hopper:** Well, *I* don't think it should be, anymore than I think it should cheat you. As I said, if you don't like it, change it. But I'm not sure too many people want to change it, because they're having too good a time cheating it. I don't even think we have enough people who understand what that war in Vietnam is all about. If you tell America that 75 percent of our industries are making war, in the most still moment of their night, will Americans want 75 percent of their industries to have to change the next morning? That's a terrible trap. Actually, when you get down to it, I don't think many people understand the economic structure of this country. And if they *do* understand it, they don't want to do anything about it.

**Gallery:** Are you sure *you* understand it?
**Hopper:** I understand enough to know that at the moment 75 percent of our industries are based on making war. And I know that I'm willing to give that up.

**Gallery:** That seems easy enough for you to say—after all, you're not dependent upon an industrial job for your livelihood.
**Hopper:** That's right, I'm not.

**Gallery:** And to pursue that further, don't you have accountants and lawyers maneuvering your money to beat the government out of taxes?

**Hopper:** Not anymore, I don't. And I never wanted that. I wanted them to pay my taxes and to pay off my house, my little piece of land, and my movie theatre. That's all I wanted and I could have done that very easily. But because I was working, going right from *Easy Rider* to *The Last Movie*, I gave them power of attorney—and they decided I was an asshole for wanting to pay my taxes. Instead, they put me into all these long-range tax gimmicks like convalescent hospitals, warehouses—if they're empty and depreciating all the better—oil fields that maybe were drilled and maybe weren't, copper mines that may or may not exist, and other things like that. And now there's a great question whether I'll *ever* be able to pay off my house.

**Gallery:** Are you saying you're broke?
**Hopper:** No, I have $30,000 in the bank. But I owe $80,000 on my house, $20,000 on a piece of land, $15,000 on a movie theatre in Taos and $150,000 in taxes. In the last four years I made a million and a half dollars and I could certainly have owned a $160,000 house by now instead of owing $80,000 on it—just by paying my taxes and without all their gimmicks and tax-saving trips which have done nothing but lose money and which I asked them not to do. Besides the house, I could also have owned a $30,000 piece of land and a $20,000 movie theatre. And it's ridiculous to me to think that I owe that much in taxes. Because, like I don't have any *use* for a convalescent hospital that doesn't make me any money, even though the business managers used what should have been the government's tax money to buy it for me—which ended up with me borrowing money to pay it off. Copper mines and oil wells? What the hell do I want with *them*?

**Gallery:** Did you get rid of your business managers?
**Hopper:** Damn right I did, but unfortunately I can't get any of that money back. What they pulled may be smart business but I don't want to be in business. I just wanted to own some land with a house on it which I'm probably gonna turn into a school, anyway. I just wanted to own a movie theatre here so that when I'm editing I can run my stuff in it, and also show some good films in a town that doesn't get many. The theatre could make money or lose money or break even and it wouldn't matter to me; I would like to be an educator and also be able to write and make my films and act and just not have to worry about money and business, which I find really frustrating. But I'm not sweating it; because I can always come up with that $125 a month rent on my house.

**Gallery:** Still, those sound like desperate financial straits to be in.
**Hopper:** The situation may be desperate, but *I'm* not. Financially, yeah, it looks pretty grim to me. If I'm lucky some of those investments will come through and if they do, man, I'm getting rid of them *immediately*. And paying my taxes and paying off the three things that I want. But right now I just have a lot of money tied up in investments that I hope exist; I say *hope*, because I don't have substantial documentation on *any* of them. I won't mention their names, but I was with a supposedly very good firm in Los Angeles, and I'm not suggesting they ripped me off—but I'm pretty sure of it. And even if every one of their investments for me is real, which I doubt, the whole idea of putting an actor's money into long-range things couldn't be much dumber.

**Gallery:** Why do you say that?
**Hopper:** For a very simple reason: Once an actor becomes a star, the life expectancy of his career is only three years, and that's true in the great, great majority of cases. Well, when you're into long-range investments—especially ones you've borrowed money on—how the hell do you get out alive? The problem actors have is that it's rather easy to rip them off, because most of them have never had any money and have no idea what to do with it—and the money men know this, and also know the odds against your remaining a star. Of course, what they did with my money is just a reflection of how investment has turned into a giant maneuver to cheat the government.

**Gallery:** Would you mind being more specific about that?
**Hopper:** Not at all. The average guy on Wall Street whose business is investing other people's money now spends maybe 10 percent of his time in creative business and 90 percent of his time trying to figure how to cheat the government out of his clients' taxes. Today, that's where it's at—find those loopholes. But that's not productive for the man and it's certainly not productive for the country. Instead of helping create businesses, the man is now involved in finding ways to rip off the government. His copout is that he's only benefiting his clients, and of course, they go along with him.

**Gallery:** If you think America is made up of people all trying to cheat the government and ready to venerate the criminal, what caused the country to go in that direction—or do you feel we've always been that way?

**Hopper:** I really don't know what America used to be like. I'm just a guy who grew up on a farm in Dodge City, Kansas, and at school I was told everybody could be President and that Santa Claus was real. I believed that until I found out that Santa was my father and not much later I came to understand that, no, everybody does *not* have an equal shot at being President. As I grew older I continued to discover that the facts of American life are much different than what we were taught, and by now, most of those secrets have been laid out for me. But because I'm not a reader, many times I came upon them in a state of naiveté. And it's been rather disappointing to me; I'm a romantic idealist and the myths I learned as a schoolboy were much more satisfying than the realities I've encountered as a man.

**Gallery:** You mentioned you don't read; is there any particular reason for that?

**Hopper:** Well, I could give you the heroic point of view, which is that I refuse to read; that I've got my own ideas and eyes and ears and that I don't want to have other people's impressions pushed upon me. Like, I'd rather experience things for myself and come to my own conclusions. That's the heroic point of view and I've told that to people, but it isn't the truth. The real reason it happened is that I never learned to read properly. When I was young I was moved from one school to another that was much more advanced, and it just threw me. I mean, I can read, and I can sort of spell and I do write, but I don't read books very often. I'm not unhappy it happened, because I did formulate my own ideas and had to start using and relying more on my senses than people who are able to curl up with a book and experience the world through someone else's eyes. I used to say I've only read a dozen books in my life but I've read more, and I'm often among people who are extremely well-read, so it's not as if I'm unaware of too many things. The only time my lack of reading bothers me is when the subject is law or business; at that point I don't have the knowledge I need and I can only hope I'll have a good lawyer or good business manager. I've had my problems there. But I'm reasonably well-informed about what's happening because strangely enough, I'm an avid news buff—I really love to read newspapers and watch television news. In fact, I get down when I don't watch both the morning and evening TV newscasts. To me, that's a more immediate thing than getting into somebody else's fantasy trip, which is what most novels are. But even though I'm compulsive about TV news, watching it only makes me very pessimistic about our future.

**Gallery:** In what way?
**Hopper:** I look at America today and I really wonder how much longer a society like ours can exist. How much longer can we have wars, how much longer can we keep raising our national debt and shaking our missiles before it all falls apart? What's wrong with the country is that we've forgotten how we started, which was to have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people—and that the people then have to approve and support that government. That's not happening today, and it's really important if you're going to have a strong country. You need people who are patriotic, and I don't mean you stand at attention when the national anthem is played and tears come to your eyes while it's going on, because we can all do that. I mean you have to back the government.

That means you don't try to rip it off every possible chance you get. And I don't think that starts at the bottom, either. It starts at the top with people in responsible positions—responsible positions in government and responsible positions in business. They know that tax laws, for instance, can be changed, because they're the ones who changed them. Loopholes, you know, didn't just pop up by themselves, and don't just happen to favor the rich, who can afford to spend a lot of time and money playing with them. It's not considered radical, of course, when you change the law to favor the rich. It's radical and dangerous only when you want to change the law to help out the poor.

**Gallery:** Then you consider yourself a radical?
**Hopper:** I was more of a radical when I lived in Los Angeles. I've found that it's different being a radical in the city than in the country. In the city, that scene is all about people rapping in coffee houses and bars and *saying* they're radical. Like, you get together with some people at Max's Kansas City, talk about how you're going to change things and then everybody orders another round just before closing time. There isn't that much talking done in Taos, but a lot of people here are true revolutionary radicals—Chicanos, Indians, and Anglos—and have guns and shoot people. That may happen in the city and I'm not saying it doesn't, but it's just much easier to be a radical talker there. That's great, but be a radical talker here and you're gonna be talking to a lot of radicals, who may or may not like what you're saying, because this town has radicals on the right as well as on the left—really heavy Minutemen, militia, and three Anglo-vigilante committees. And sometimes the radicals on the left get together with the radicals on the right, as was true when the whole

hippie thing was going down. Even the Indians got into it, because one night some longhairs killed a couple of their buffalo for food.

**Gallery:** Is life in Taos really as perilous, on a day-to-day basis, as it's starting to sound?
**Hopper:** Well, I'm not living in a kibbutz in Israel where the Arabs are hitting on me every night, but there is a similarity. In a big city you don't think somebody's gonna come up to your house one night and try to kill you and they don't come up to you and say they're gonna kill you. In Taos they do—and you never know if they will or won't. But here there's also an opportunity to find out about the differences you have with other groups. I can sit and talk to some of the right wing vigilantes because I see them everyday and I know who they are and they know who I am. So we'll have a drink, and it's the same thing with the Chicanos and Indians and the commune people. And that's a big advantage over living in a city, where you're always in an isolated group that already thinks the way you do.

**Gallery:** You seem highly critical of urban radicals. Why?
**Hopper:** I'm not saying there aren't activists or true radicals in the city, it's just that most people who say they're radical never *do* anything radical. And a lot of 'em who come on as radical are just full of shit. Like in the Presidential campaign, I didn't see too many knocking themselves out for George McGovern. That's no mystery to me; a lot of radicals I know have parents set to leave them millions. And that's also true of plenty of kids in SDS, because while they do a radical trip, their folks are loaded. And they thought, well, wait a minute. If McGovern's gonna push inheritance taxes way up, maybe I better lay back. You see, when a guy like McGovern tells them it's time to start shaking up the basket and it's soon gonna be their turn to pick a number, they'd rather keep the number they have. Change might mean something else.

**Gallery:** In your case, Dennis, change has seen you become a man who seems calm, reflective, and highly satisfied with his life. What caused all that?
**Hopper:** Just one person, my wife Daria. Since we met, my life has been a different and better one that I've ever had. Daria is a friend, someone I can share things with, someone who puts up with me and who is a mother, a lover, a whore, and a daughter to me. She's also smarter than me in a lot of ways. Really, Daria's the best thing that ever happened to me. And

she feels the same way I do about Taos, which would have to be the second best thing that's ever happened to me. The town's special meaning for me is that for the first time in my life I feel like I have a home, a place to return to. I don't think even financial considerations could ever force me to leave. I'll leave to work, but I'll always return, because every time I'm gone I miss Taos and I can't wait to get back, to come over that hill and see the mountain and the plateau again. I've never been able to say it before, but now I can: This is my home, this is where I'll live out my life.

# Dennis Hopper: Easy Rider on a Bum Trip

Arthur Bell/1974

From *Viva*, March 1974.

"I can see myself living in the wilderness with my wife and baby—no shortwave radio, no phone, lots of owls—yeah, owls, yeah—and herds of elks and petrified dinosaurs. Wow! A petrified forest—the nearest neighbor, sixty miles away. I won't miss much, I won't miss anything, man. I won't miss the money. I won't miss the movies. I won't miss shit."

Dennis Hopper is dreaming in the Rose Room of the Algonquin Hotel where Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker, and Alexander Woollcott hunted dinosaurs forty-five years ago. Dennis is in his cups. He's had his third drink and the *New York Times* has just torn his latest movie *Kid Blue* to shreds. "Dennis Hopper is getting a bit long in the tooth to play waifs with much conviction," wrote Vincent Canby, and Dennis, who is thirty-seven, is bombing the whole fucking mess, man, out of his genius mind.

Yeah, genius. Genius is the word one hears most, followed by "juvenile" and "egocentric." "Dennis is a genius," says Joanne Woodward, who knew the kid way back when. "I'm not sure of what. Certainly not acting. I just know he's a genius."

Anyway, the genius is feeling his drinks and his disorientation and his age this boozy afternoon at the Algonquin, and his ego is wavering around in the rumbleseat of his mind, way back, man, way out of time, out of touch, and he's touching bases he hasn't touched in a long time. His trip is sincere and humble and honest this time, and he's not acting, unless you can call it Method.

The earth thing. Purity. Kicking material nasties in the shins. Dennis on the Alicia Bay Laurel trip. It figures as sure as his last wedding.

That was purity, man, in May 1972, when Dennis said "I do" for the third time. That was not an ordinary merger of souls in the church with mums spread around the hall. Dennis's bride was Daria Halprin, granddaughter of the founder of Hadassah, a part-time movie actress and rich and voluptuous, and the knot was tied on a hillside overlooking San Francisco Bay with friends and in-laws climbing up the mountain to their assigned seats at the blast of a trumpet. The music was a composition for synthesizer, ram's horn, and a Yemenite trumpet, composed especially for the occasion. To the melody of a flute song, Daria, in a purple velvet Navaho creation, walked to the bridal canopy designed by her father, landscape architect Laurence Halprin. After the traditional Jewish ceremonial crushing of the wineglass under Dennis's shoe, everybody danced a hora to the "Have Nagila"—arranged for guitars and Congo drums. Nirvana, no? Nirvana, yes.

Now Daria is upstairs in their Algonquin room with the Hopper baby "doing the whole Jewish-mother bit," as Dennis puts it, while Daddy meets the press and sloshes.

Daria. Ah, Daria. Will she return to the screen? "I don't know. We haven't discussed it," says Dennis. "We met after her film debut in Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, but I didn't ball her immediately. I restrained myself. Shit. I was going crazy." Actress Sylvia Miles introduced them. You talk to Sylvia and she'll tell you, "We were all at this film festival in Yugoslavia. Daria and I got there a little early and she was kinda lonely, she didn't have any friends or anything. I introduced her to Dennis and that was the last I saw of Daria or Dennis. So what else can you do in Belgrade? You know, I wasn't even invited to their wedding. But who can be mad at Dennis?"

Who can be mad at Dennis? Ex-wives can be mad at Dennis. Discarded girl friends. Movie producers. Critics. Uncle Sam. And sometimes Dennis himself can be mad at Dennis. For genius is a pain in the ass, especially when genius is somewhat self-destructive, somewhat childish, somewhat flower-child preachy ("That's your trip, man, not mine" to dissenters), disheveled, aging, and terrifically sexy. Ex-wife Brooke Hayward is especially mad at Dennis. So mad, she offered a plaintive "No comment" when asked about him. Brooke was Dennis's first. She, too, was a one-time actress. She did *Mad Dog Coll* in the movies and starred in *Mandingo* on Broadway, which is where she met Dennis. Brooke's mother was Margaret Sullavan, former stage-and-screen star who committed suicide New Year's Eve, 1960. And her father was Leland Hayward, agent and producer. When Dennis married Brooke, the lady had a

million smackeroos and Dennis had hardly a pot to piss in. They set up housekeeping in Hollywood. Dennis collected art—Rauschenbergs, Jasper Johns, the first Andy Warhol soup can, found objects. Dennis's film career was riding low. They had a baby. They hung out with Jane Fonda and her brother, Peter. Hedda called them "the fun couple"—moneyed, beautiful, liberal, and erratic. To know the Hoppers was to know happiness. But life was not always Technicolor under the Hollywood sun. Little annoyances from Dennis. Annoyances like the power of Brooke's money stultifying the flowering of Dennis's genius. Then, one day, the topper. It involved Dennis's crazy scheme to film *Easy Rider*.

"Very strange," says Dennis, toying with the saltshaker and harking back to a time he is only too eager to talk about. "I was filled with anxiety about a film I believed in, one that would make or break me. And I was getting ready to catch a flight to Louisiana, when Brooke told me I was going after fool's gold. It's not exactly what I wanted to hear. I told her, 'If this is what you feel as I'm leaving to do what I've wanted to do all my life, I want you to get a divorce!' And she did. That's exactly what she did. She kept all the art. Stuff that we bought for peanuts. It's worth about five million now. And later she tried to put me in jail because of back payments on the $140 a month I owed on child support. Why did she do it? Man, it's simple. She's in love with me. Still is. It's difficult to understand the rich. Much easier to understand the poor."

Dennis sees Brooke only occasionally. She drops off their eleven-year-old daughter for visits when Dennis is in Hollywood. "Strange vibes. We have nothing to say to each other," says Dennis effortlessly, as if he were talking about a movie he saw last night.

Marriage Number 2 was one of the shortest recorded in Hollywood annals. Dennis and Michelle Phillips were hitched for five days, having previously carried on a torrid romance for a year. Michelle, fresh from the Mamas and the Papas and a divorce from chief Papa John Phillips, traveled to the Andes in 1970 to act in Dennis's *The Last Movie*. Her traveling companion was Peter Fonda. Peter faded out and Dennis faded in, and what followed were many sleepless nights and endless fights spread over two continents. According to one source, Dennis threw a cup of hot water at Michelle, precipitating the bust-up. According to Dennis, it was "no such thing. Michelle's neurotic, like, uh, neurotic to me is someone who cannot fall in love and who cannot hate, someone who can't get it off. Like, the opposite to neurotic is someone who falls in love and manages to hate, which is how I am. Look, I've nothing against Michelle. She's a marvelous woman. I'm glad I met her. She's just neurotic, that's

all. We were in Los Angeles together and she came back with me to my house in Taos and I kicked her out because of a bad trip that went down. She's a castrater, man. I mean, we were married for an hour and out of the blue she says, 'Have you ever thought of committing suicide?' Heavy. Not my trip."

Apparently, Michelle survived the trip, and went on to *Dillinger* in films and Jack Nicholson in real life. Nicholson is Dennis's pal (he supported Dennis and Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider*, making Michelle the original *Rider* groupie) and there's no hard feelings. "Jack's got the suits, the shoes, the thirties' outfits, and Michelle. He loves it. He loves being a movie star. I love the work."

However convoluted Dennis's marriage life has been, his career and social life have been more so. He is very anxious to please, if he thinks you're an underdog; very anxious to irritate, if he thinks you're on top of the heap; very changeable and very prone to being walked on. Andy Warhol remembers that "when I first met Dennis, he was doing photography and painting. He was so good-looking and he always talked about doing something and it seemed like it would never happen, yet it always did. I liked him, but I never understood him. I mean, he's so strange. But he's really great."

Dennis was born in Kansas in 1936, the son of a railway postal clerk. Life was rough for the Hoppers. There was no money and Dennis found nourishment in his own imagination, a source of strength that was to sustain him through Hollywood, past the drug stage, the marriages, the back-to-nature period, and beyond.

During World War II, Dennis's dad served in the OSS and his mother worked in a defense plant. Dennis lived with his grandparents on an isolated farm outside Dodge City. "At the age of eight or nine, I started taking peyote with the Indians," says Dennis, "and I continued taking it until I was twenty-five." At eleven, he began going to the movies. He fed off them. Republic Westerns: Smiley Burnette, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers. They devastated him. "I'd live the movies, man! Those dark theaters in Kansas, Saturday afternoons, that was big news to me!"

When he was fourteen, the family moved to San Diego. He was shy, he says, but felt compelled to enter high school debating contests, which he usually won. During his seventeenth summer, he apprenticed at the La Jolla Playhouse, then run by actress Dorothy McGuire and her husband. The next year, he received a scholarship to the National Shakespeare Festival and played in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. At nineteen, he came to Hollywood, delivered phone books, stole milk from porches,

"and you know, just generally sort of hustled." That year, he was interviewed by Harry Cohn, the outspoken head of Columbia Pictures, but "the bastard kicked me out of his office. He wanted to send me to school for eight months to take the Shakespeare out of me. I said, 'Fuck you, man,' and was banned from Columbia and never worked there until *Easy Rider*, fifteen years later."

Still, 1954 was a good year. Marlon and Marilyn were king and queen and Jimmy Dean had just hit a homer with *East of Eden*, and the studios were signing new faces to term contracts—Joanne Woodward at Fox, John Saxon at Universal, and Dennis at Warner Bros. For an opener, he was assigned a supporting role in *Rebel Without a Cause*, starring James Dean. The two hit it off immediately. They shared an excitement about acting and about the film medium, about innovative possibilities left untouched by the motion picture industry. They teamed together again in *Giant*, and the memory of that experience is still vivid in Dennis's mind. "Vivid," he says, toying with his Fu Manchu mustache, "today and always. . . .

"There was one scene that Jimmy Dean did that was earth-shattering. Brilliant. I grabbed him, took him to a car, and told him, 'I don't know how you do it. I've got to know.' So he tells me this thing. This thing that if you're smoking a cigarette, don't act, don't pretend, smoke the cigarette. Dumb? Simple? Sure, but who the fuck knew how to do it? Who does it? Anyway, about two weeks before Jimmy died, I did a scene with him and Rock Hudson where I was on the phone about a hurricane or something. It was the last scene I had in the film and in the middle of the take I stopped and said, 'This isn't right.' George Stevens, the director, snapped, 'Don't you say cut, mister. Who the hell do you think you are?' Like that was the first time I was shattered in front of a crew and I was shaking. Later, Jimmy told me, 'I wish everyone could have been here today, Dennis, to see you do that scene.' Man, like that was it. When he said that I started crying. Tears rolled down my face. 'Let me tell you,' Jimmy said. 'I appreciate the fact that you're crying, Dennis. When you can cry, you know the score.' Two weeks later, Dean was killed."

Dean's death in an automobile accident affected Dennis in a catastrophic and catalytic way. He tore up his studio contract and went to New York, where there were no memories or associations. There he studied at the Actors Studio and worked seriously at photography, painting, and sculpture. In 1957 he felt strong enough to return to lotusland. Small roles in *Gunfight at the OK Corral* with John Wayne and *The Story of Mankind* with Hedy Lamarr followed. Then *From Hell to Texas*. His costars

were Don Murray and Diane Varsi and the director was Henry Hathaway. "Diane was a little girl who hitchhiked from San Francisco after seeing *Rebel Without a Cause* and a year later played in three big Fox films. She was madly in love with me. After *From Hell to Texas*, she had a nervous breakdown and went off somewhere to Vermont." For Dennis, the entire experience was hellish. "Henry Hathaway showed me every gesture, like I was some fucking idiot, some little fool he could play with. He had a reputation for strict discipline on his sets and he wasn't getting it from me. I don't know why I didn't tell him to go fuck himself immediately. He made me do one scene eighty-five different ways, man, eighty-five different fucking takes. I crawled up the wall for twelve hours."

As a result of the Hathaway incident, Dennis found himself unemployable. For the next seven years he studied in New York. He also carved out a new career as a photographer for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. He married Brooke and began his art collection and in 1961 starred in *Night Tide*, a runaway film directed by Curtis Harrington. It was the first American feature film to be shot entirely on city streets. Then, ironically, Henry Hathaway, perhaps suffering conscience pangs, brought Dennis back to Hollywood for a supporting role in *The Sons of Katie Elder*. Dennis's career began to rise again. He made *The Trip* with Susan Strasberg, whose father, Lee, had been his mentor at the Actors Studio. Peter Fonda starred and Jack Nicholson wrote the screenplay. The film paved the way for *Easy Rider*. It also paved the way to a new phase in Dennis's life.

"I'd been on trips before, but I never did acid until *The Trip*." The movie was Dennis's coming out. Being a dedicated Method actor, he dropped and dropped and dropped. "It was a groove, man, like I was floating high, but now if I had a choice between acid and peyote, I'd take peyote hands down. Peyote, uh, makes things grow. It makes the flowers come alive. Acid is like eating an IBM machine. It's programmed, it's mechanical. Cocaine's my trip too, that's something else. It's not habit-forming. I don't take habit-forming drugs. Never did. Never did heroin. And I keep away from speed. Downs are not my trip, either. I drink too much for downs. Amyl nitrate is good. But that's for a sex trip. I can't imagine anyone sitting around and giggling on an amy because there's just one thing to do with it and that, baby, pow, is orgasm."

While he's talking, James Frawley, the director of *Kid Blue*, comes into the Rose Room to remind Dennis that he has a radio show in fifteen minutes. "Cancel it," says Dennis. "Better yet, you do it." Frawley answers with, "I do a terrific Dennis Hopper imitation." He affects a soft reedy tenor and mumbles a few "mans." Dennis chuckles. "Take it away.

You're on." Frawley leaves and Dennis orders a beer and continues talking about his odyssey. We are now the only customers in the restaurant.

"*Easy Rider*, yeah, *Easy Rider*." When he talks about his personal baby, his voice becomes deadly serious and the eyes go far away and Dennis glides into a visionary bit laced with love and bitterness. He boasts that the film was a leader in showing the smoking of grass on screen. "Amazing, huh?

"I always wanted to make a movie with Peter Fonda and Peter gave me a chance with *Easy Rider* and I love him, but I love a lot of people more than I love Peter. Man, Peter stole half of my points on the picture. I own 7 percent of the gross and Peter's got 12 percent. He made over a half-million dollars." Cynics have written that *Easy Rider*'s principal message is that when persons with long hair travel in open vehicles, they ought to do so in groups larger than two: nevertheless, the movie did make a persuasive statement about the perils of the antiestablishment lifestyle in America and it spoke directly to the kids who were buying tickets. Five years after its initial release, the film resembles a piece of corroded pop culture. It comes off outdated and falsely romantic—Dennis with his Barrymore profile and a wild look in his eye, ripping through the landscape on his bike, edgy, dissatisfied, disconsolate with himself, Fonda, and the state of the Union. I remark to Dennis that there's nothing as dated as the immediate past, but Dennis isn't into taking criticism on *Rider* and calls the waiter over and asks if it's possible to bring back beer to his hotel room. The waiter gives Dennis a horrified "But, monsieur" and suggests he try room service and Dennis mutters "crap" and flows into a somber masochistic rap about the vicissitudes of fame: "It would have been much better if no one had ever met Dennis Hopper. You know what I mean? Like Brando and Jimmy Dean were intelligent in not giving interviews. People made up things about them, romanticized, put them on a pedestal. By isolating themselves, the public never saw that they were just human beings, man. Mystery begets mystery." He topples a bottle of beer and it flows from the table onto his Kit Carson jacket and his pants. He asks the waiter for a napkin and begins a slow cleanup, commenting that he likes the smell of beer. He talks about *The Last Movie*, which did for Dennis what Waterloo did for Napoleon.

Dennis spent a couple of months in Peru with actors who were his friends—Fonda, Sylvia Miles, John Phillip Law, Jim Mitchum, Julie Adams—filming a Pirandellian movie-within-a-movie about a troupe of actors shooting a Western on location, the effect of the troupe on the morals of the townsfolk, the fate of a stuntman (played by Dennis) who stays

behind, the takeover of the abandoned movie set by the townsfolk, and the gradual substitution of the world of fantasy for the real world of the village. The story was based on an incident that happened when Dennis was filming *Gunfight at the OK Corral* and Dennis wanted John Wayne to play the movie stuntman. As it turned out, Dennis went the whole shebang—he wrote, directed, edited, and starred in *Last Movie*.

Sylvia Miles remembers the location jaunt as yet another mirror of unreality. "We were shooting at the second highest altitude in the world, The horses were dropping dead, the stuntmen were fainting, everyone was running fevers and had Montezuma's revenge or the trots, we were all on oxygen, and it took three hours each day to get to the location from where we were staying. All of that would have been worth it, if we had come out with a decent movie. At one point, Dennis showed forty hours of rushes of the most extraordinary footage imaginable. Then he took a year to edit the film with a bunch of people freeloading off him in Taos. He would not allow anyone to come in to help him edit it, and he cut out practically every frame of film that was decent."

Dennis doesn't see it that way. "First of all, the only reason Universal gave me the contract to make *The Last Movie* was out of greed. They were thinking of the money *Easy Rider* made and saw more dollar signs for themselves. And when I gave them the finished print, they didn't like the film. They don't like anything that makes fun of the movie business, no matter how right on, how full of truths.

"*Movie* was a very personal film about things in my head—things I see and hear—morals, pervasions, decadence, philosophy, how we're educated, how we die. It was a victim of the studio and the critics' fickleness. And because of its failure, I'm a victim of that whole sick Hollywood trip. At the top one moment, with *Easy Rider*, then finding myself disposed of and quickly forgotten by the mob."

*Kid Blue*, made after *The Last Movie*, bombed too, despite efforts by the New York Film Society to pump life into it. The film opened at a New York East Side art house and was pulled after four days. Dennis claims he hasn't had a nibble to act in or direct a film since.

Yet with Dennis, it's always been chicken today, feathers tomorrow, and who knows what the I Ching will bring? "I owe $248,000 in taxes to the government and it goes up 5 percent a month. I also owe $100,000 on my house in Taos and—you know something?—it's not a trip on my head.

"Daria has a lot to do with it. With Daria there's an incredible trust and love like I've never experienced in this fucking world before. Like,

I don't know what's going down outside, but I know one sure thing—man, I've lived. I've had an incredible life and it's going to be far more incredible before it's over and done with."

With that, the aging genius beckons the waiter, swigs down the last swallow of beer, and toddles out of the Rose Room to the elevator and Daria and the baby and the joints and tomorrow, New Mexico, and the day after, who knows, the petrified forest, man, with the owls and the elks and the dinosaurs.

# Rebel Without a Pause

Mark Goodman/1978

From *New Times*, October 1978.

When Dennis Hopper first moved to Taos in 1970, it was something less than the social utopia that D. H. Lawrence and Mabel Dodge had envisioned when they arrived in these New Mexican highlands in the 1920s. No fewer than thirty hippie communes had blossomed here on the highest plateau west of Tibet, but their flowered love was not returned by the local police or the tough high school Chicanos. In what must be the grisliest example of insult to injury on recent American record, gangs of young machos were castrating the boys and raping their girl friends. And that's when Dennis Hopper, of the Dodge City Hoppers, took charge.

He and I are sitting at the Sagebrush Inn bar, sucking on cans of Coors at high noon, as he recalls Taos's Time of Troubles: "It was bad when I came here, man, really bad. Suddenly there was me, this movie freak, with my brother and all these hippies around, and the locals didn't dig it. Every time my brother and I would walk into town these cars would come swinging around us with guys leaning out yelling, 'Hey, man, we're gonna rape your wife and your sister!'"

Hopper's cobalt blue eyes glitter in the shadows of the bar. "Hippies would be hitchhiking," he continues in a voice of whiskey gravel, "and when the cops spotted them, they'd call the football team and those guys would come beat the shit out of them while the cops were watching. After a while they'd blow their sirens, and when the high school kids had disappeared, they'd arrest the hippies. And it's true, man, the guys were getting mutilated and the girls raped. Finally one night I said. 'Fuck it,' and got a gun and put it in the back seat of the car. So sure enough, a bunch of kids stopped me and my brother, like they were going to ask directions."

Hopper pauses, takes a deep swig from his can and barks a short ner-

vous laugh. "Anyway, I got out with the gun in my hand and said, 'Okay, everybody up against the wall.' By the time my brother had called the police, there was a lynch mob out there of a good 150 people wantin' to hang our asses. It looked like a scene out of *Viva Zapata*—pitchforks, machetes, the works. Pretty soon the police showed up—and arrested me and my brother. That cut it. After we were released the next day, I went into the local sporting goods store and bought every gun in the place. Then I called some stunt men buddies of mine in Hollywood and said, 'Look, I need your help, 'cause the staties here sure aren't going to help me.' I also asked for federal help, but that was a joke. Turns out the guys running the general store were undercover feds checking out the communes."

Hopper is grousing about the perfidy of the state, but one suspects he really liked it that way: the Lonely Gun, taking on the local *comancheros* with only a few loyal hands at his side. "So we set up machine-gun nests and rifles on the rooftops—good fields of fire. Then I went into the high school and told those kids, 'Look, I'm here, and here I'm going to stay. What's more, there are more freaks coming in over the next few months, and though they may have long hair, they are not the love generation. They're back from Viet Nam, and they're hard dudes.'" Hopper wipes the beer from his mustache. "I explained to them, 'Macho is macho, and if this keeps up, somebody is going to get hurt around here. Just because these hippies are dropping acid, that doesn't give you the right to rape their women and cut their balls off.'

"Well, they listened, and they finally got the message. After that I got involved in community activities, and things finally cooled down."

So it was that Dennis Hopper, Hollywood's most feared guerrilla of the sixties, retreated into his mountain redoubt, there to lick his wounds and plot his return. The wounds were deep. In 1956 he had caught everyone's attention as Rock and Liz's son the doctor in *Giant*. But a year later, director Henry Hathaway, murderously exasperated after shooting a scene of *From Hell to Texas* eighty-six times, told Hopper, "Kid, there's one thing I can promise you: You'll never work in this town again." Hopper in fact, scarcely worked for the next eight years; only his marriage to Brooke (*Haywire*) Hayward saved him from total extinction. Then, in 1968, Peter Fonda, another outcast surviving only on family connections, asked Hopper to help write as well as direct and costar in a doubtful enterprise called *Easy Rider*. The results were seismic. Hopper and Fonda's movie was not only the most combustible American screen epic ever, but it dared to reverse fifty years of Hollywood mythmaking. Here

the hard-eyed vagrants were gentle, existential giants; the simple, pious townsfolk, bleak-spirited dry-gulchers. In 1969 that seemed all it might take to blow our purple mountain's majesty all across the fruited plain. Yet the film grossed some $25 million, and in Hollywood that would gain Ho Chi Minh himself a booth and a private phone at the Polo Lounge. Hopper belonged again.

But not for long. Universal Studios put up a total of $1.1 million and sent him off to the Andes to make something called *The Last Movie*, even giving him the ultimate filmmaking privilege of final cut. The cast included Hopper and some of his rowdiest Hollywood outlaw sidekicks: Jim Mitchum, John Philip Law, Russ Tamblyn, Dean Stockwell, and Fonda. It is moot whether the production or the final product was the larger calamity. Coke blanketed the location like an Andean snowfall and Hopper was very nearly kicked out of Peru for making allegedly inflammatory statements to radical students. Dennis managed to stay long enough to grab a local who was pestering him and smash his head through a coffee table—and, incidentally, to finish filming the movie. He then spent two years editing the film. It is an act of cryptic charity merely to say that film bombed. Hopper doused his Hollywood campfires in the night, and stole off to the mountains. He had made, for the time being, his last movie.

Hopper is eager to show off his Taos. We leave the Sagebrush Inn (where Georgia O'Keeffe once had a studio) for a tour of the town. Hopper drives a nicely battered pickup truck, complete with cracked windshield. He blends in well with the harsh mountain scenery: Well-weathered dungarees and jacket, perennially rolled cowboy hat, ravaged boots, ravaged face, burning blue eyes staring intently over a sharp, hooked nose and a fierce red mustache, facing down a hostile world. Where once he was plump, at forty-two he is now lean, hard, and prickly as cactus. He reminds me of someone from a distant, fantasy past, and as I grope through childhood memories, I finally grasp it: Dennis Hopper looks like a grown-up, more or less real- life version of Yosemite Sam.

On the road, Hopper squints through a blinding prism of sun and dust; he would no more wear dark glasses than he would carry a Gucci tote bag. The town itself is determinedly picturesque, an open quadrangle of one-story adobe buildings facing an ancient fountain. Another pickup stops us, and a bronzed, crinkled Indian head thrusts toward Hopper. "Hey, pardner!" the man yells at Dennis. "We got those buffalo steaks for you out at my place." Dennis replies, "You're on, man. How're you'all doin' out there, anyway?" After a few more rustic pleasantries,

we pull into a side street in front of brother David's jewelry shop. David's not around, but his hip-mountaineer shopkeeper obediently trots out some of their choice pieces. "He's got thirty-five local artists working for him," says Dennis, with evident pride. "Just look at some of that work."

Indeed, the craftwork is magnificent, bracelets and necklaces intricately beaded and bejeweled. Me, the Eastern naif, thinks about picking up a trinket for my daughter. Turns out, Elizabeth can either have this necklace or go to school for the next four years. Price: $8,700. The next stop is La Cocina, a favorite Mexican restaurant. During lunch Hopper's visiting compadres troop in: singer Neil Young, actors Stockwell and Tamblyn. Young, draped in a serape, is instantly recognizable, but only the most astute movie buffs would spot *The Boy with Green Hair* or the acrobatic faun of *West Side Story*. Stockwell favors a mustache and goatee, serape and plumed Western hat; Tamblyn, in a sheepskin jacket, has a mustache and a reddish-blond afro, and weighs close to two hundred pounds. The trio is in town to scout locations for a film, provocatively titled *Human Highway*.

Stockwell and Tamblyn swap stories about a mutual leading lady of past movies, but Hopper prefers to rummage through Hollywood mythology for his tales. "One of my favorites is about John Barrymore and John Carradine," he recalls. Everyone listens up; Hopper has the raconteur's gift. "Seems Barrymore was pissed because he thought Carradine was always imitating him. So he went through this huge charade to set up a phony screen test. Carradine was supposed to come out of the men's room, wipe his mouth and exit right. Well, they marched him through twenty-eight takes, and Carradine was really getting pissed. Finally, on the twenty-ninth take, Barrymore sneaks into the scene so's Carradine can't notice. Carradine comes out, wipes his mouth—and there's Barrymore right behind him, grinning like a satyr—and zipping up his fly." Hopper claps his hands and howls in glee. "Those guys were beautiful—they really knew how to do it."

As we drive out toward Hopper's place, he points out the courthouse. "See how funny it looks? It was built backward! The architect didn't catch it until it was too late—they just went ahead and finished it the way they started. That's Taos, man!"

We turn off the main highway and onto a dirt road that will lead us to the Mabel Dodge complex of adobe houses where Hopper lives. He explains that he used to own Dodge's main house, but sold it in January and moved into a nearby house that actually sits on Indian land. I asked him what drew him there.

"The mountains, man, the mountains," he says. "I never really felt like I had a home before, but now I do. I believe in the Indian way—whatever that means. It's like, a rock is a rock, a mountain is a mountain, water is water. . . ."

Primitive wisdom is often oversold; even Freud would concede that a rock is sometimes just a rock. Yet there is something elemental and arresting about Hopper's presence here. Just as Fellini thrives on juxtaposing pre-Christian and post-Christian Rome, so we have here the phantasmagoria of pre-civilization America, where the ghosts of painted tribes are said to walk, being inhabited by this savage totem of post-civilization America. Images old and new commingle. . . . Hopper, fire-tempered warrior, his bloody lance brandished against the sienna sky, calling his enemies to battle in a tongue ancient and terrible. . . .

Dennis also has a rather more practical reason for his present abode. "It's cool living on Indian land," he says, "because if you get juiced up in town and get into trouble, the local cops can't touch you. Dig this, man, the *feds* have to come out. They have to stand on this side of that little bridge"—he points to the rickety structure that connects his house with the main complex—"and they're kind of embarrassed, see?" Bark of laughter, then he mimics a civil-service voice. "Er-ah-Mr. Hopper, could you *possibly* come over here for just a moment?"

Dennis slams on the brakes in front of his house. A writer once said of Hopper's house in Hollywood that it was "the Prado of Pop," and Hopper clearly has transferred that concept to his adobe dwelling on the outskirts of Taos. The tiny dirt courtyard is decorated with Mobil and Pennzoil signs, filched signal lights, blue-and-white slot benches, an antique wooden stove, and, on the stone porch, a dilapidated rocker. The two-story interior I can only describe as Aging Radical Gothic: Pop art of Mao and Monroe, maps of the U.S. with Dennis and Fonda astride the land on their famous bikes, a PCI flag with hammer and sickle. There are Indian drums, serapes, madonnas, African devil masks, quotes from the Torah and Jesus on the cross in terrifying surrealism. Legend has it that Hopper once found a portrait of Jesus that looked exactly like him, then took it everywhere he went in the certainty that, like Christ, he would die in his thirty-third year. As one of his friends put it, "I'm not sure if he was relieved or sorry when he turned thirty-four."

Whatever else is said about Hopper, the very premise of his life is his wild, holy, uncompromised vision of film as the New Testament of the twentieth century. Hear his passion, as he once expressed it in a remem-

brance of his youth: "When I was little, I lived on a farm near Dodge City, Kansas. Wheat fields all around, as far as you could see. No neighbors, no other kids. Just a train that came through once a day. I used to spend hours wondering where it came from and where it went to. Then when I was about five my grandmother put some eggs in her apron and we walked five miles to town and she sold the eggs and took me to my first movie. And right away it hit me—the places I was seeing on the screen were the places the train came from and went to! The world on the screen was the real world, and I felt as if my heart would explode I wanted so much to be a part of it. I hate to make movies. But I've got to do it. It justifies my existence. If I couldn't, I'd destroy myself."

He was the son of a rock-willed, Fundamentalist mother and a father for whom life seems to have lost its glory once his World War II days with the OSS in China were done. The parents were at each other's throats constantly, and young Dennis would not forgive them for it. "I ran away from home probably more than anyone," he says. Then: "Aw, not really, but I ran away a couple of times." It was brother David's bronchial asthma that brought Dennis within reasonable proximity of Oz; when he was thirteen, the family moved to San Diego. Hopper began doing Shakespeare at San Diego's Old Globe Theater, and invited actress Dorothy McGuire to watch. Her tutelage and his own intensity won Dennis a Warner contract at the vernal age of eighteen. "I was really into sports, too," he recalls. "I played baseball, boxed a bit. I imagine that if I had grown up in Italy, I would have been a race driver. Spain or Mexico, I might have been a bullfighter. I know I ruled out normal work. I wanted to be an artist, poet, something that would last. Guys like Van Gogh, Gauguin, Rimbaud, they gave me faith because their lives were tragic ruins, but they would still be remembered centuries later."

The telephone rings. It is his father on the line. Dennis calls downstairs, to Gigi Gray, his personal secretary, to pick up the phone. "Dad, how are you? . . . Listen, Dad, I need that typewriter, I've got to get going on this screenplay. . . . Dad, do you know anything about capital gains? I'm thinking of taking the money from the sale of the house and putting it into the theater here. . . . Gigi, you're going to have to handle this stuff, I'm worthless at money. . . . Yeah, hi, Mom, I love you . . . yeah, yeah, I know, Mom . . . I'm a weird guy, but what the fuck. . . ."

He reminds his father again of the typewriter, then hangs up and returns to his youth. "As a kid I was hooked on Westerns, but when I met Dean on the set of *Rebel Without a Cause* I started going to European

movies. I liked the idea of hand-held cameras and open spaces. We were locked into four walls in those days. Truffaut and Godard taught us to bolt the studio doors and go out and shoot."

But it was James Dean who taught him fully to appreciate his craft. The awe is still there in Hopper's jaded voice. "He was the most talented person I've ever seen. I thought I was potentially the best actor in the world. Then I saw Dean and realized I didn't know shit from shinola. I finally grabbed him one day and said, 'Hey, man, you're so much better than me I don't know what's happening.' We got to be tight friends. He told me about his mother dying and how he used to cry on her grave, and how those tears turned to resentment that she had deserted him. I told him how much I hated the regimentation of my home life. We both realized after a while that it was that love-hate that drove us."

It was said that Dean's death so obsessed Hopper that he carried Dean's ring with him always, that one night he and James Bridges (director of *September 30, 1955*) stood together atop Laurel Canyon crying, "Jimmy, Jimmy, which star are you?" Now Hopper pauses for a long moment. "Remembering him isn't as hard these days as it used to be. But after Dean died—well, that's when I started riding dirt bikes with McQueen and racing a few go-carts with Newman." Brittle laugh. "Do you know something, man? I can't stand the goddamn things. Like, with *Easy Rider*, everyone thought I was a heavy biker, right? I was *terrified* of that bike. I had hit an oil slick once on Sunset Boulevard with a chick on the back, and I was in the hospital for ten days. So when I made the movie, every time a shot was done, that bike went right on the truck."

Hopper was dangerous enough on foot. Indeed, the stories about him comprise a modern Hollywood mythology that makes the tales of Fields and Flynn and Barrymore read like Dink Stover at Yale. Hopper, they say, in the heyday of the sixties, was convinced the FBI was stalking him, and used to prowl the L.A. suburbs near his home with a gun in search of the G-men. There are tapes showing him going berserk on the set of *Easy Rider*; when a cameraman threw a handy television set at him, Hopper cracked the guy with a karate chop. (The next day seventeen members of the cast quit.) He fought as well with his friend Fonda, who agreed to continue with the film only after the intercession of producer Bert Schneider. Fonda became so alarmed after his run-ins with Hopper that he hired a bodyguard and packed a gun to match the one Hopper was likely to be carrying.

Long before his *Easy Rider* antics, Hopper stunned the film industry by marrying into its innermost circle. Brooke Hayward was, of course, the

golden daughter of agent Leland Hayward and actress Margaret Sullavan. Dennis helped provide a measure of the misery that inspired *Haywire*, a bone-bruising karate chop to Hayward's nose being the merest preliminary. Eventually, she took their daughter Marin and left him. Later came his celebrated eight-day marriage to Michelle Phillips, which he recalls with surprising good humor. "We'd been together for eight months," he says, cracking open another beer, "and got married on Halloween. I wanted to show her that we could be married and she could still have her career." Ah, hear the blind egos, colliding in the night. "She went off to work with Leonard Cohen and called me eight days later. I said, 'I love you, I need you.' She said, 'Have you ever thought of suicide?" Dennis later married actress Daria Halprin (*Zabriskie Point*), who bore him another daughter. Two years later she left Hopper and Hollywood, and is now a practicing clinical psychologist.

All of which would make Hopper nothing more than a tetherless renegade were it not for the fierce centrifugal force of his talents. Not just as an actor, mind you—although there are sober men in Hollywood who will tell you that he is one of the best in the business when he wants to be (e.g., the loco in *Cool Hand Luke*). Hopper, the director and screenwriter, has shown flashes of lyrical brilliance. So, reputedly, has Hopper the poet. (Hopper, who once said he does not read "because books have nothing to say, man," has written thousands of poems.) His early paintings and later photographic assemblages were shown in the best L.A. galleries and museums across the country, and he once mounted a collection of Pop Art estimated to be worth nearly $1 million.

Hopper stretches out on his double bed and pops the tab on a fresh beer. Throughout his legend runs a constant thread of drunken and drug-induced rages. He admits to the former, dismisses the latter. "I was never on hard drugs at all," he insists. "Hell, man, if anything, alcohol is my addiction." He settles back to talk.

"Have I mellowed at all? Yes. Am I still a macho motherfucker? Yes, that's true, too. Look, there are times in my life I've been really stupid, like hitting a woman with my open hand. Hell, you can break a nose that way, although I'm not sure I actually *broke* her nose." He takes a pull on his beer. "You know, I met Jim Brown at a party once. He said to me, 'You're the guy who beats up women.' Can you dig that? Here's a guy who once threw a girl off a *balcony*. But yeah, I was stupid. There were just certain moral things that, on my Midwestern upbringing level, I couldn't apprehend, so I would strike out. But the gun business wasn't paranoia, it was real—the guns were for protection. The other is just drunk animal

time, lashing out. Still, I'll tell you, I never remember starting a fight, but I've finished a lot that I didn't start."

And did he really do all those things written about him? Are those incontinent performances that terrorized Hollywood for real? "Oh, yeah, man, I did it, all right. I was desperate. I'm also a compulsive creator, and I can't stand being lied to. At parties I'd nail a producer in a corner and demand to know, 'Why am I not directing? Why am I not acting?' Who wants to deal with a maniac like that?"

Hopper grins tightly at the memories. "Tell the truth, it's just plain difficult for me to be in society—to be a social being. That's why I'm better off up here. New York and Hollywood are hard for me, where you have to go and sit in a producer's lap at those parties. Oh, I can do it for a while, but then I find I'm acting. I think it's my worst performance. I try to be polite and courteous, and then sure enough, I get pissed off and blow it. Let's face it, I can't stay on my best behavior for long. . . . I don't have the social amenities to make it or enjoy it."

I ask about the poetry and the art. "I lost 15,000 poems and 380 paintings in the Bel Air fire of '61," he says. "Luckily, I had a photography showing in L.A. that night, or the photos would have been lost, too. I tried to write and paint again, but I just couldn't. So I started assembling objects and photographing them, but after *Easy Rider* I never took any more photos."

And after *The Last Movie*, he directed no more films. "I haven't been able to get financing since then, it's that simple," he says. "That movie won the Venice Film Festival in 1971, yet Universal never even distributed it outside this country." Hopper went on to act in movies such as *Kid Blue* and *The American Friend*, but they did poorly at the box office.

"If they don't explain the game to you, what a schmuck you can be," he says evenly. "I thought I was doing them a favor, making *Easy Rider* for $340,000, but in fact I was a threat to them. I was fucking up their system. I was an idiot in their eyes—pat the idiot on the back and let him go. Well they did pat me on the back. They gave me $1.1 million to shoot *Last Movie*. Hell, they can do that anytime they want. They write off $800,000, even if they only spend $150,000 on distribution and publicity. A year later they sell the outtakes back to their own company for $1 million for a TV show. So now they've made money *without even distributing the movie*. But they couldn't do that with *The Last Movie* without my permission because I had final cut. So Dennis Hopper, who's proved he can make movies that make money, who can shoot in the streets and cut budgets. . . ." There is a sharp ring of truth in Hopper's child/cynic's

view of his profession, an attitude reminiscent of Prewitt's deep, unreasoning love of the army in *From Here to Eternity . . . just because a man loves a thing don't mean it has to love him back.* "See, politics means everything in this business, because it's so big. I have no resentment against these men—anyone who can make movies is okay in my book. I'm just astonished at the energies and complexities of their business. How in hell they got it all together, I don't know. Jesus, sound films are only fifty years old.

"All I regret," he says with a sigh, "is that nobody taught me how to play. I'm not shocked at their ethics; I just feel like I never got my bar mitzvah."

Brooke Hayward once pointed out the essential problem: "Dennis is a demonic artist, like Rimbaud. Nothing matters but his work." That is why the failure of *The Last Movie* was such a crippling blow to him. If nothing else, it is the most curious, surreal autobiography ever filmed. Dennis considered it the culmination of everything he had wanted so desperately to express. It was a movie about making a movie about making a movie, a hall of blinding mirrors focusing on Hopper. As Kansas, macho loner, sensitive poet, shitkicker, Christ-figure, he was trying on all of his personas for all the world to see. The world didn't buy it, and that gored him. That is why, in exchange for *The Last Movie* outtakes, he received all the distribution rights and plans to re-release the film on his own.

*The Last Movie* will not rehabilitate Hopper, but his performance in *Apocalypse Now* just might. That is to say, if Francis Ford Coppola's elephantine Viet Nam epic (estimated cost: $30 million plus) ever gets to the screen. For his part, Hopper is serenely convinced that "it will be the best movie ever made."

"We're under contract not to talk about it," he says, his enthusiasm rising, "but Francis said he could promise me at least a nomination. It's going to be mind-shattering, because Brando and I go toe-to-toe for fifteen rounds, and you know what?"—Hopper leans forward with a glittering grin—"I think I took the gorilla in Manila!" He sits back, triumphant, his camera's eye already flickering over the scene at the awards ceremonies. "I've never had a chance to go the distance with a great actor on an equal footing. But this time I did, and I think I got him."

Hopper is revved up now. We take off in the pickup with Gigi and head toward the Sagebrush Inn. The *Human Highway* gang is already holding court in the bar. Soon there is tequila and beer enough for every living creature in the Rio Grande. (Do not ever, I repeat ever, try to keep up with

Dennis Hopper.) While some local dirt-dobber growls out a song about how he's two-hundred pounds of swingin' dog, Hopper calls for oranges, and starts to juggle. He's quickly joined by Tamblyn; the Easy Rider is no match for the West Side Story Jet. Hopper then offers a challenge to Neil Young. If Young will sing five songs, Hopper will first recite Hamlet's soliloquy. Agreed, says Young. Hopper swaggers through the smoky darkness to the dim red- lighted stage, faces down his desert-leather audience and begins: *To be or not to be/ that is the question*. . . . A madman's gleam in his eyes and a spectral carbine in his hands, he does the whole thing, and he is goddamn terrific—Olivier of the mountain. His audience loves it; most don't know Stratford-on-Avon from Margaritaville, but they clap like old Billy at the end . . . *That motherfucker Dennis, he can flat get it on*. . . .

Later, as we drive through the eerie, star-swarmed New Mexican night, Hopper reflects on his post-revolution phase. "I've been doing a college lecture tour," he says. "I hit a few schools, show *The Last Movie*, then open the house to questions. Besides trying to get a feel about the film, I'm also interested in seeing what people feel in the universities these days. After all, we're not trying to stop a war anymore. I thought it would mean they could work harder and not be bothered. But I've found they're a little bored—they want a cause to come along. They ask me, 'What are we supposed to do? You're supposed to be our spokesman.'

"So I tell them, 'Look, don't you think I'm a little old to be your spokesman? I'm forty-two, for Chrissakes. Why don't you just study and have a good time?' See, I have no bones to pick anymore, no chip on my shoulder. And it's not just because I'm older. Look, I think Jane Fonda and I won the war, but I'm not going to run for the fuckin' Senate. For me, it's over. And hell, I can't say that my politics hurt me in Hollywood. It was probably my own dogmatic personality." Hopper pulls out a cigarette and lights up; that and the headlights are the only terrestrial glimmer in the dark, brooding night.

"Anyway, I think I'm best at social commentary, not political commentary. Know what I want to do most? I want to make a linear movie, with a beginning, middle, and end. I want to make a film that people want to see. I think of *Last Movie* as being a palette—it showed all my colors and strokes. Now it's time for a movie that folks can follow and enjoy."

While I ponder the midlife mellowing of Hollywood's most monstrous man-child, Hopper suddenly says, "I don't think I ever want to do

another interview. Fuck it. A lot of the great legends didn't—Dean, he never did. I don't think I ever will again, either."

I lift my nose, a stag startled at a once-peaceful salt lick. It's the first whiff I've caught of the dread hunter. Gigi, seated between us, quickly intervenes.

"But you got good vibrations from this interview, didn't you Dennis?"

"No," he says shortly, "I didn't get good vibrations at all."

I search, impossibly, for a topic at once light and meaningful. I remember a Hopper apothegm I had once read, and I quote it: *I would like to make other kinds of movies. But until the world straightens up, I'm going to keep on making movies that torment the world, the same way the world torments me.*

"Given all you've been saying today," I offer, "I guess you don't really feel that way anymore, right?"

Hopper keeps his eyes straight ahead. "Oh, no," he says softly. "No, man, you got it wrong. That's exactly the way I feel."

It suddenly strikes me, like a chill wind stealing over the mountains, what my role is here: I'm one more walk-on in Dennis Hopper's never-ending last movie.

# An Interview with Dennis Hopper: Is the Country Catching Up to Him?

Lewis Archibald/1983

From *The Aquarian Weekly*, April 20, 1983. Reprinted by permission of *The Aquarian Weekly*.

"My daughter, my twenty-year-old daughter, told me a couple of weeks ago: 'Dad, if you're never remembered for anything else, you'll be remembered for saying 'Man' more times than any other actor in films."

Dennis Hopper laughs lightly at the thought—it's not the high snicker he and so many other young actors of the fifties perfected when they were playing Sweet Sixteen psychos or teenage killers aching to go up against Rock Hudson or Alan Ladd—but a rueful sound.

It's hard to think of Dennis Hopper, the anti-Establishment kid, the hippie extraordinaire, the creator of *Easy Rider* and *The Last Movie*, as having a twenty-year-old daughter. Or staying in any place as frostily dignified as The Essex House (where the interview was held). Or being that most un-hip of things, a forty-seven-year-old man whose middle is wider than it was and whose hair is a lot greyer.

Though, interestingly, the face is sharper without the curly-cue lushness of cheek and lip that pushed him over into those overripe baby-killer parts.

"'Like, hey, man,'" he says remembering the old image. "'Can you dig it, man?' I thought that was a real funny thing for her to say."

But Dennis Hopper, after more career ups and downs than most rollercoasters, is still working, still acting, still directing. He has roles in upcoming films by Coppola (*Rumble Fish*), Peckinpah (*The Osterman Weekend*), and Neil Young (*Human Highway*), and he's currently promoting *Out of the Blue*, a wild and nihilistic depiction of family life in which he plays an alcoholic true father. Sharon Farrell is the junkie mother and

magnetic Linda Manz is the punk-oriented daughter. They're not a group likely to endear themselves to the Moral Majority.

Originally Hopper was just supposed to play the father's role ("I was out of work. I love to act, and I thought I could do something with the part"), but after a few days of shooting, the director was fired and Hopper was asked to take over. Needless to say, he felt the film should move in some different directions.

"Originally," he says, "it was the case history of the Linda Manz character, and the whole thing was narrated from Raymond Burr's point of view." (Burr plays, very briefly now, a child psychologist.) "I hadn't directed for a long time, and I just sort of fell in love with Linda Manz and I'd been there two weeks and I hadn't worked and I wanted to work. So I rewrote the script a lot. There was a scene in the diner where Sharon Farrell worked that had them all hearing that Elvis had just died, and I couldn't imagine how you could direct a scene like that. You know, where these women start hysterically crying when they hear Elvis is dying, oh boy! So that became Linda discussing the fact that she is going to join Elvis."

Hopper admits that in directing this film, "I borrowed from a lot of people. I mean there's a scene with a taxicab driver that I think of as Ingmar Bergman. And I went back to Henry Hathaway" (for whom Hopper had worked in three Westerns including *True Grit*). "He actually gives actors line readings. So I'd give Linda Manz move by move direction. 'Put the lipstick on. Put it down. Lift this up. Get up. Turn twice, you know.'

"I had only four weeks and two days to shoot the film," the director adds. "I did every trick I could possibly think of. And I shot it in such a way that it couldn't really be changed in editing" (an old John Ford trick). "But it was also the first time I'd ever been able to see my film on a daily basis. When we shot *Easy Rider*, we were traveling across the country and when I got back, I saw thirty-two hours of film, or whatever, instead of seeing it every night. And when I came back from Peru with *The Last Movie*, I saw forty-two hours of film.

"Normally you see it the next day. You see what you shot the day before and you say to an editor, 'Give me that two shot, give me that closeup, give me that long shot, give me a shot of the fire hydrant.' Because you remember everything you shot. And so when you come out of the finished shoot rather than having thirty-two hours of film, you've got three and a half hours you can look at. So I edited *Blue* in six weeks rather than the year and a half it took on *Easy Rider* or the two years it took on *Last Movie*. And that at least proved something to me. Because the thing

was 'Well, Hopper can't edit. He takes too long.' And that was never the problem really."

The problem was getting someone to look at the film. Hopper's close friend Jack Nicholson saw it, called it a masterpiece (he even did a radio commercial for it) and with Warren Beatty's help tried to interest the majors. But they weren't picking up much that was independent then (the film was ready three years ago and was shown at Cannes in 1980) and after that it languished until Discovery Films, a small company, decided to give it a try.

In some ways the wait has been to the film's advantage. Linda Manz's character might have seemed much more unbelievable three years ago than it does now with punk rock invading everything from sophisticated comedy to sci-fi futurism.

Hopper smiles at this thought.

"At that time, they were saying 'Aw man, what are you doing anything about punk for? Punk's already finished.' That was when I was doing it, okay? And it's like the same thing Peter Fonda said to me when we were doing *Easy Rider*. One day he said he was going to get a haircut and I should get a haircut too because long hair was over. And we were shooting that in 1967."

In fact on the very eve of the flower power revolution, the period that sanctified long hair. Indeed it could be said that *Easy Rider*'s popularity kept long hair around for a year or two more.

Those were good times for Dennis Hopper. There were a lot of opposites as well. Back in the late fifties, at a time when Hopper the actor was competing for roles and sometimes playing opposite people like James Dean, Sal Mineo, Nick Adams, and Tab Hunter, he suddenly found himself blacklisted. But not for his political views.

"They used to play a game," he says "where they'd pass the word from one studio to another. They'd say 'Hey, he's unmanageable' and 'He did eighty-four takes, eighty-six takes over here with Hathaway, and we don't want him working anymore.' And the other studios would just say, 'okay,' and you don't understand why you're not getting jobs anymore."

Something similar happened to Hopper after the failure of his very costly, very ballyhooed *Last Movie*. "You do a film like that," he says, "and you edit it, and you try to put in abstract expressionist ideas and new ideas and underground ideas and you come back and say, 'I won the Venice Film Festival,' and they say, 'Recut it!'

"I thought people were interested in new kinds of film. I thought they were ready for it. And really all they wanted to see were romantic forties

kinds of films. And escapism films. They didn't want to see films that they had to think about. I made what I consider to be an art film and I still consider it an art film and it gets more interesting with time; it's almost a time capsule now. Especially when it's balanced with what was happening at the time. The war."

(*The Last Movie* was finally released in 1971 as the Vietnam War was finally winding down.)

"After that job I had a really difficult time of it. I don't think anybody would really trust me with a final cut." (He didn't really have final cut on *Blue* either.) "They wanted to think *Easy Rider* was a fluke and they didn't see any merit in *Last Movie*. But I think I have two things which are my fortes. One is my knowledge of art, visual art: my eye and my photography. And my working with actors. Those are my strong areas."

"I give my actors a lot of input," Hopper adds. "Because that's all you have on your screen, is people. It's like Ingmar Bergman says, if you're supposed to have a coffee mug and you cast a Victorian cup, then you've got the wrong mug. You might as well forget it because actors are like photographing objects. And yet you want real emotions from them, you want them to be that person. So that means that you really have to get very involved with these people, understand them and try to get as deep as you can into them. I do and I use as much of them as I possibly can. Put them and their problems, whatever they have, into the film."

It doesn't hurt that Hopper himself is doing a lot of acting these days. *Rumble Fish* is his second film for Coppola (he was the stoned-out photographer in *Apocalypse Now*), he has three other films waiting to come out and there's even talk about a sequel to *Easy Rider*.

A sequel? Wait a minute. Weren't Hopper and Fonda very very dead at the film's conclusion?

"Yeah," says Hopper smiling at the vagaries of Hollywood's money men. "This has been Michael O'Donoghue's big problem in writing it: how we come back. In the first draft he has it taking place over a hundred years after the Holocaust and somebody comes from Up There on a golden bike and says 'Hey, you guys get up!' and then he gives Peter the flag to restore the country. It's a black comedy definitely.

"That is," he adds, "if there are any laughs."

Dennis Hopper thinks for a moment.

"Well," he says. "It's black. That I know."

# Head of Hopper

Robert Morales/1983

From *Heavy Metal*, July 1983. Copyright © 1983 by Robert Morales. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Made in 1980, *Out of the Blue* is a ninety-minute feature chock full of sex, violence, drug abuse, death, and emotional outbursts—or at least enough to keep one's attention, if the surprising plot twists and stylish examination of about a dozen cultural conflicts fall short. It is the third film to be directed by Dennis Hopper, who although only signed on for a supporting role, stepped in to save the film when its original writer-director walked off the project. Hopper threw out much of the plot—essentially a TV-movie tearjerker about a troubled teenage runaway, saved by a shrink (Raymond Burr) who was to be the story's hero—and replaced it with a riveting portrayal of a young, Elvis-and-punk obsessed girl (Linda Manz) with the world's most fucked-up parents, played by Hopper and Sharon Farrell.

Hopper's career seems to break down into three public phases, and *Out of the Blue*—as well as supporting roles in the upcoming Coppola adaptation of S. E. Hinton's *Rumble Fish* and Sam Peckinpah's adaptation of Robert Ludlum's *The Osterman Weekend*—is seen hopefully as the start of a fourth. His first break came in the 1950s, when he costarred with James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant*. He left Hollywood to study acting in New York and to settle in New Mexico, where he still lives. Phase Two: In 1967 Hopper began co-writing and costarring in his first directorial effort, *Easy Rider*. When the film was released in 1969, it hit an as-yet-untapped counterculture film audience like a revelation. It became an enormous critical and financial success, and make Hopper and his costars, Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson, household names. He was then asked by Universal Studios to make a "new kind of movie." Not understanding that he was being hired to repeat his *Easy Rider* formula,

Hopper came back in 1971 with an avant-garde film shot in Peru, entitled (with what would turn out to be great irony) *The Last Movie*. It won first prize at that year's Venice Film Festival and was a hit in Europe; but in Hollywood, Hopper's name was a cryptogram for mud. Phase Three: In 1977 he gave the performance of his career in *The American Friend*, a film by German director Wim Wenders. But it took another two years, and his crazed *Apocalypse Now* combat photographer, for most Americans to get the idea that he was still among the living.

At forty-seven, Dennis Hopper is someone who, like a lot of near-casualties of the sixties, is constantly on the lookout for trap doors while exuding all the while a tenderness in his dealings, an acceptance and earnestness about his past. His way of speaking is pure stream of consciousness, loaded with anecdotes pieced together with trick voices, facial expressions, and a fervor impossible to reproduce on paper. Go see his movie.

**HM:** I know you've been working, but how do you feel when people react to you like you've been on a desert island for ten years?
**DH:** (Laughs) Well, I wish I *had* been. I just know I've been working very hard just to survive and trying to keep in the motion picture business. I miss not working in the United States. I'd really like to direct a film again, but now I'm just basically concentrating on getting some good acting roles, trying to establish the fact that I'm not a difficult person to work with. I feel that probably the best roles I've had were in *The American Friend* and in *Apocalypse Now*—not a major role, but a very interesting one.
**HM:** Are you happy with the roles you've just completed?
**DH:** The father in *Rumble Fish* is not a large part; I only have four scenes in the picture. And I had a very good supporting role in *Osterman Weekend* . . . but I want to get one of those parts that De Niro or Hoffman or Jack (Nicholson) get—I know I'm not bankable; they are—to get a really excellent part in an excellent picture would be wonderful.

**HM:** You're identified with a certain facet of the sixties counterculture—a friend of mine suggested I ask you whether you considered yourself an actor or an historical figure. (Hopper laughs.) You were known for playing these fearsome, up-against-the-oldsters types . . . and in *Out of the Blue* you're an aging biker-type with a daughter who's part of a new generation, portrayed as almost scarier than what you epitomized.
**DH:** You mean, like, the people who were rebelling in the sixties had still

some sort of hero quality, or they were rebelling against something—perhaps victimized by it—and in a way, had sympathy whereas the *Out of the Blue* type (Linda Manz's character) . . .

**HM:** . . . rebels against people who used to have sympathy on their side fifteen years earlier.
**DH:** Right.

**HM:** What do you think about a lot of the stuff you might have been held accountable for in the sixties and how it's progressed?
**DH:** It goes through my mind something like this. I think about the civil rights movement when I was in the Selma and Montgomery marches, when people couldn't drink out of the same water fountains or go to the same toilets. Now, I mention that to someone in their twenties, and they sort of look at me like "What're you talking about?"—so I don't talk about it.

I think of the Hollywood system, of the sixty-to-eighty year olds controlling the industry like schoolmarms—"Say your lines this way, pick up the thing this way"—which was totally against Method acting, where you were not supposed to have preconceived ideas and you were supposed to deal with moment-to-moment reality. . . . And all those things have changed, so talking about that seems (laugh) ridiculous.

I think that the younger generation have the same desires that we all had—whatever they were. When I hit thirty—I thought I'd never live to see thirty. As a matter of fact, I remember when we were all in Berkeley—I think I was twenty-seven (circa 1963–64 then)—I said, "I got a great slogan, why don't we say 'You can't trust anyone over thirty?'" And three years later I was thirty, and women were coming up to me and saying "How old are you?"—because that had caught on.

I think that every generation rebels against whatever generation their parents belong to—and I think that's healthy. If all of the children of the Love Generation came out acid heads and flower children, I think that probably would have been the end of the country, but they seemed to have rebelled against that by being too conservative, and the punk movement is a reaction against conservatism. We start off with bohemianism and that became Beat or the Lost Generation, and that then became the hippies, and that became punk or the New Wave. The rebellion—whether it's punk, whatever it is—towards the older generation, if you can survive and get through that, the wants and the needs are the

same. And it's an attention-getter, and it identifies you with your group and your peers.

I think whatever we wanted may have changed because you only have so long to get there. I came out of abstract expressionism and jazz, which was really radical; and the civil rights movement, which was really radical; and the free speech movement, which was really radical. Besides me trying to be an actor, trying to be responsible to that and turn shit into gold because most of my parts, unfortunately, were shit and made under very difficult circumstances.

**HM:** Along with the generation gap thing, the other major element in *Out of the Blue* is that you have a strong, independent female lead. One of the main feminist complaints in the sixties was that many of their fellow radicals held to the notion that power was still a man's game, and that most of the communes set up then were very patriarchal in structure—and they'd point to *Easy Rider* as an example of guys doing whatever they wanted while the woman stayed home washing Captain America T-shirts.

**DH:** (Laughs, ruminates a moment) It really would depend on the commune; there were many different kinds of communes—a lot of them were heavily run by women, a lot of them were dominated by males. That kind of life is a questionable lifestyle for many people, at the time it was a way to get away and survive because everyone was not sure how much longer things were gonna go. There was more of a feeling of having to survive, having to get to the mountains, that there might really be a revolution, there might really be a necessity to protect yourself, protect your family, to be with your friends, to be together. Nineteen sixty-seven we made *Easy Rider* and the whole country was burning down, there were riots in every city, and there was a war in Vietnam.

The woman's role . . . (slyly) I'm just glad that women have gone back to wearing garter belts and stockings. I think a woman's role is whatever she wants it to be. She has to make that choice. I can't make it for her. I found working with Linda (Manz) and investigating that part was something that was really exciting to me; that really stimulated me to work with women, because I had never really done that before and I would like to do a lot more of that. It's much more interesting working in those areas, trying to understand another sex, than to make the buddy movie—not that Peter's dull (laughter)—which I'm not saying isn't valid or I won't do it again, but it's something that I have done and being thrown

into this picture and suddenly there's Linda and Sharon; that was really a far out and interesting experience.

**HM:** I would figure it's less interesting to work out what you already know.
**DH:** Yeah, right, and there's a great part of me that has always been very cruel, I guess, to women, because I don't understand them, and yet there's a lot of me that's very female. My curiosity has always been towards the mystery of the female.

**HM:** So how're you doing in general, having fun?
**DH:** Work is fun. In general? Nah, I haven't been having a great deal of fun. It's more work to get work, than to work, and waiting to see if you get work. It really becomes a drag. And to be selling this picture—after I made it three years ago, and I haven't made another one, and I want to make another one . . . and what is my next job gonna be, and when am I gonna act again . . . and there's no steady income. I mean, just simple things like that, but it's a gypsy camp, man. I've had a very full life; it's very confusing to think about. I'm just really lucky to've survived—that's amazing to me.

# Citizen Hopper

Chris Hodenfield/1986

From *Film Comment*, November–December 1986. Reprinted by permission of *Film Comment*.

Sure, Dennis Hopper says, he really did once sit in a circle of exploding dynamite. It was all part of a retrospective of his life's work, called, fittingly enough, "Art on the Edge." It happened about four years ago, shortly before he had himself committed.

After an exhibition of Hopper's movies and photographs at Rice University in Houston, culture lovers expected to see Hopper make an appearance. But those filing into the auditorium found instead a barrage of images being flashed on the screen, and sound booming from the seats and walls. A closed-circuit hookup beamed the image of Hopper, speaking from elsewhere on campus. The only way they would see him in person, Hopper told them, was to get on the bus for the Big H Speedway, a racetrack outside of town. There, surrounded by a race-night crowd, they would see Hopper blow himself up in the Russian Suicide Death Chair.

He had seen the stunt done once when he was a child in Kansas. The reasoning went like this: Someone surrounded by dynamite would be in a safe vacuum, as if in the eye of a hurricane. If three sticks did not explode, it would, however, mean death. Hopper had heard the stunt was once used after the Russian Revolution by Bolsheviks who wanted to ceremoniously "execute" noblemen whom they really wanted to save.

Hopper originally wanted to incorporate the idea in his movie *Easy Rider*, but it was never filmed. So he did it in front of a crowd of university students and race car fans in Houston. All his friends flew in for the party, too, expecting to see Hopper finally kill himself.

Besides acting on the artist's urge to make a statement. Hopper delivered a perfectly symbolic statement of his life at the time.

"People," he concurs now, "were worried about my sanity."

When Hopper was a boy in Dodge City, he came across a book that would change his life. He read it over and over until he almost had it memorized. Young Hopper, who had known since the age of seven he was destined to be an actor, had not picked out some noble testament of the theatrical life. He had found his truth in Gene Fowler's *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, a recounting of Hollywood's mad, drunken bohemia of the thirties and forties.

Providing potent images for the Kansas youth were gaudy drunks like John Barrymore and W. C. Fields. Barrymore had descended from his status as America's greatest Shakespearean actor to a legendary sot who would, on occasion, rise before the microphones and portray himself as a legendary sot. But brightest of all in this book was a man called Sadakichi Hartmann, a German-Japanese art critic, poet, and "fuming savant," who, Fowler says, "pranced like an accelerated zombie among the easels and the inkpots of the elite, entering the ateliers without knocking, stepping on the toes of his apostles, heckling his personal benefactors, drinking on the cuff, dancing with gargoyle attitude, and mumbling his own weird rondels over the briskets of dowagers slumming in Greenwich Village. . . ."

It was a hell of a blueprint for the artist's life. Hopper, now fifty and being pursued by publishers for his own wild autobiography, still recalls the book with warm fervor. 'This was not sentimental!" he said the other day in his explosive cackle. "Somebody leaves Sadakichi Hartmann this big mansion in Beverly Hills while they go to Europe. When they come back he's turned out all the lights and painted 'Let there be light!' all over the ceiling. He's torn down this very elaborate bannister and used it for firewood. He decides he's going to die, so he takes this coffin out in the desert and takes a bunch of liquor with him. He lays out in the desert for two days and he doesn't die. I mean, it's great stuff."

And if this book was read over and over?

"Then you knew what an artist was. A drinker. A drinker-drugger."

You can hire a living legend. He'll come to your movie set and be a noticeable presence. He is short and not physically imposing, but his head is large and striking, and, through the usual indefinable cinemaphotographic alchemy, he does cut a figure. He's always worth watching. And he has that legend.

If you know only two or three things about Dennis Hopper, you just assume he goes to sleep at night with a gun under his pillow. A remarkable number of people in Hollywood, his industry town, do not know

that he is not necessarily living up to his legend anymore, that for three years he has been a model citizen. Director David Lynch, for instance, did not know that the actor was clean, sober, and good-looking when Hopper was suggested for the role of the hopped-up psychopath in *Blue Velvet*. Lynch just assumed that Hopper was still, you know, Dennis Hopper. Still zany. Still ripsnortin' and rootin'-tootin'. Especially snortin' and tootin'. And still clutching the gun under his pillow.

The public doesn't know what to think, either. This is the former juvenile actor from the fifties who was blackballed from movies, then made a comeback and a fortune directing and costarring in *Easy Rider*. Then he immediately goes to Peru to make *The Last Movie*, with peyote stoking the fires, and everyone is there to record the joy ride, from *Esquire* to *Seventeen* to *Rolling Stone*. *Life*'s 1970 cover story starts this way: "Furor trails him like a pet anaconda. At thirty-four he is known in Hollywood as a sullen renegade who talks revolution, settles arguments with karate, goes to bed with groups, and has taken trips on everything you can swallow or shoot."

From there it only gets more colorful. Hopper hastily writes a letter to *Variety*, protesting that the only thing in his life he has ever shot up is vitamin B-12. *The Last Movie* flops, and for years he works only sporadically, only once more as a director, taking the helm of a scuzzy Canadian melodrama called *Out of the Blue* (1980). In photographs he has angry eyes. In Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and *Rumble Fish*, he has the face of a human train wreck.

The popular image of Hopper concealed another person. There was another person there somewhere, a person with some very serious views on art. *Easy Rider*, for instance, may now be laughed off as a period piece, but it details its era with a gothic perfection. The hilarious stoned rap about spaceships was not an improvisation by Jack Nicholson but, according to Peter Fonda, a scene written by Dennis Hopper.

As for that typecast wreckage seen in *Apocalypse Now*, Hopper flew from its location shoot in the Philippines to the German set of Wim Wenders's *The American Friend*, and a day later was playing someone entirely different, someone combed, quiet, and dangerous.

Suddenly this year he is the hardest-working man in show business. Here he is as Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet*, viciously inhaling on a gas mask as he sexually mauls Isabella Rossellini. Being so damn creepy and vile and violent that just by the force of his voice and the threat of his suddenness he makes the moviegoer sink down in his seat. Later, he plants a nasty kiss on the face of the whey-faced protagonist, played by Kyle

MacLachlan, and hisses, "In dreams . . . I walk with you." It is a voice that promises the flash of a razor. When I saw the movie, three women walked out of the theater during this scene.

"I don't know where Frank Booth came from," David Lynch says. "He just appeared one day. There's nobody that I based anything on. For me, he's like an archetype. He's a guy I somehow know from small towns. He's an American heavy. He has to be American, and he has to come from either a desert small town or a Midwestern small town. And he just started talking, and I started writing.

"I never knew who was going to play this part. I interviewed lots and lots of people, including Bobby Vinton [the singer who had a hit with "Blue Velvet" in 1962], and they were real keen to play the part. One guy, who I really wanted to play it before Dennis came along, kept saying, 'I don't know how I could play someone so horrible, but then I don't know how I could turn this part down.' I couldn't believe he wouldn't commit to it if he loved it so much. But it was just fate, buying time for me."

For it was Dennis Hopper who brought Frank Booth to skin-crawling life. "Dennis had been on earlier lists," Lynch says, "but because of his reputation, I never even thought twice about him. Because if I'd thought about him, I'd freak out and want to work with him no matter what he was doing. But when I heard that he was totally on the wagon and had cleaned up his act, I got real excited. His manager said, 'David, look, please talk to the producers who've worked with him recently, they'll tell you he's fantastic. I wouldn't tell you this if it weren't true. Dennis is in love with life, he's really got it together and he really loves this part and can we have Dennis call you?' I said sure. Dennis called up and said, 'I've got to play this part, David, because I am Frank.' And that almost killed it right there.

"Dennis is the only guy who could have played that part. What he offered was the life of Frank Booth. You see a much more complicated Frank and a guy who definitely has so much love. And maybe it's twisted love and complicated emotions going on inside the guy. So you say, this is not a one-note person, this is a person who is very complete, although very dangerous at the same time.

"He's got so much power, and he's got a quality like Jack Nicholson has—and that is, you can't stop watching the guy. He's got a presence. A punch in the nose is one thing. But a thought introduced into the mind lasts so long, it doesn't seem to shake loose. And Frank seems to understand these things.

"My first impression of Dennis? Well, he's one suave fucker. That's what Frank says to Ben [Dean Stockwell]. That's Frank, too."

To do what he has been doing, the actor has had to cut a deal with his vanity. Consider two other recent movies. In Tim Hunter's *River's Edge*, he is a biker who talks romantically of the woman he killed, who sells dope to kids, who goes everywhere with an inflatable doll. In *Hoosiers*, he portrays a former small-town basketball star who has become a hangdog town drunk. In all three movies, he only gets marginal opportunity to say, "Hey, it's really only me here, Mr. Wonderful, the guy you know and love." And how could Tobe Hooper have resisted casting him in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre II*, or Mick Jagger's first feature-length video? In the upcoming James Toback picture, *The Pick-Up Artist*, Hopper plays an alcoholic compulsive gambler. About the only serious change of pace in the schedule is the *Easy Rider* sequel planned by producer Bert Schneider. To be called *Easy Riders*, or perhaps *Don't Tread on Me*, and again costarring Peter Fonda, it would be a post-apocalypse black comedy. There's something hypnotic, something entrancing about seeing this famous old bozo try on these motley suits of clothes and stomp around the fifty-foot (or the twenty-one-inch) screen. Why is he doing this to himself?

"I'm doing these roles sober," reported a very sober Dennis Hopper. "Which is interesting, because I used to do a lot of my roles on drugs or alcohol. I used to joke around and say I was going to write a book someday on 'The Six Drugs and How to Use Them in Acting.' I would drink if that would help me with a scene; I would take some cocaine if that would help me."

His eyes are clear and level. "So to do these roles sober is an experience. I have no problem, really," he hastens to add, "reaching the emotional depths without any artificial help like drugs or alcohol. It's a lot easier without alcohol; you don't have the mood swings, the anxieties. I fell back on my training: Strasberg, emotional memory, sense memory."

Hopper's health is reassuring. I first met him four years ago on the set of *The Osterman Weekend*. A strong dramatic current adorned that movie set because it marked the return of Sam Peckinpah after many years' battling with heart ailments, movie woes, and bottle problems. Hopper had known and admired him since 1958, when Peckinpah directed the young actor in the pilot for the TV show *The Rifleman*. In his *Osterman Weekend* dressing room, he was pale and thin, with his shoulders hunched up sorrowfully. The voice was high, plaintive, and reedy. Reflecting on Peckin-

pah, Hopper offered the doleful warning that, although a director may be surrounded by people, he is still isolated and lonely, an artist-hermit. The actor prepared for his scene with a beer and a joint. He was a devoutly thoughtful fellow, ready to analyze any subject, but his condition did seem a little shaky.

You can see the same pitiful hunched-shoulder wino posture in *Hoosiers*, but in person Hopper is much more solid and substantial. He carries a little more weight now, and it agrees with him. An executive-strength forehead looms over a craggy brow and a noble nose. He has this big strong chin and a delicate mouth, and the years and the graying hair have awarded this face a fine prairie dignity. That is, until he laughs. He still cackles like a teenager.

His house is a Frank Gehry–designed cube set down in the seedier fringes of the beach town of Venice. You find his house by going down a graffiti-encrusted alley. Inside the cube is an angular blend of styles put together by decorator Brian Murphy. Industrial-looking planes of gray walls and glass were set off by a bare lumber staircase. Film magazines and scripts were piled up on ancient wood tables; Hopper had liberated the furniture from the Mabel Dodge Luhan house that he once owned in Taos, New Mexico.

Everywhere you looked was the evidence of somebody consumed by art. Paintings, portraits, postcards broadcast modern messages on every wall. In the highest corner of the tall ceiling, hanging on a little stage, were three papier-mâché skeletons from Mexico's Day of the Dead celebrations, engaged in swordplay. The living room was dominated by a fifteen-foot-high painting by Chuck (Arnoldi), laminated wood splashed with blues and greens and slashed up with a chain saw. It had a certain eye-opening quality.

To open up his own eyes on this bright and early Sunday morning, Hopper insisted on shaving before beginning the interview. When he sat down on the gray couch by the window, nursing along a cup of coffee, he looked as solid as a judge. As we talked, he fielded phone calls from producer Fred Caruso. If the financing came through on something called *Marked for Life*, Dennis Hopper would, after years of waiting, be back in the director's chair.

**Q:** *Blue Velvet* was a particularly brave picture to do because there are a few people who have come to associate you with that kind of mad activity.

**A:** I guess there are a lot of people like that. The way agents and managers put it, "This part has no redeemable character. It's beyond redemption." And I was told the same thing about *River's Edge*. Harry Dean [Stanton] turned down *River's Edge*, and I'm not sure he didn't turn down *Blue Velvet* also. So I'm sorta picking up Harry Dean's things after he changed his image on *Paris, Texas*.

**Q:** Harry Dean wants to be a leading man.
**A:** I can understand that.

**Q:** How about you?
**A:** I'm happy to be working.

**Q:** David Lynch said you *had* to play this role, and that you said you were the character of Frank Booth.
**A:** Well, that's the way he tells it. I don't know how I got involved with this movie. I did call him and tell him that I have no problems with this role. I understand Frank Booth totally. We were on the radio in New York and David said that. The announcer said, "How do you feel about that?" David says, "I thought it was great, but I wasn't sure I wanted to have lunch with him."

In all three of these pictures, I didn't have problems understanding the characters. And David Lynch is wonderful to work with. He knows what he wants. There was no improvisation on *Blue Velvet*—that was all line by line stuff. The work was very demanding, but Isabella was very free, very open. And it was just wonderful, like a nice picnic in the park.

The thing I was worried about with David—but I trusted him because I really respect his films—I felt I was reaching an area there was no coming back from. I thought I got so high, and to that emotional level so quick and so soon in the movie, there's not going to be any color to the part. It was just going to be a one-dimensional thing, just screaming, screaming, screaming, from beginning to end. When I saw it put together, it didn't really work out that way. There are different colors. It's not just a one-note thing.

**Q:** About the only role you've played lately that resembles your walking-around persona was a cop in a TV movie, *Stark*.
**A:** You saw that, huh? Kinda dull.

**Q:** In an interview you gave to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1958, being the latest pretty-boy young actor, you talked even then of wanting to direct. What started that desire?
**A:** I wanted to direct since I was thirteen and playing Shakespeare in a theater in San Diego. I went under contract to Warner Bros. because Nick Ray said I would get a part in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and there was a possibility of a part in *Giant*. That was how I got my contract. I had the lead on a *Medic*. I played an epileptic. It was called "Boy in the Storm." Seven studios called me the next day and asked to put me under contract.

When I got to *Rebel Without a Cause*, I realized it was a director's medium. In those two pictures, I was fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to realize that Nicholas Ray and George Stevens were running the shows on their pictures—that they were involved with the writing, the directing, and so on. And that an actor—with the exception of James Dean, who was doing his own blocking and his own stuff—was basically being used by the director. I got very interested in directing. Also, Dean talked about directing.

**Q:** Could Dean have been a director?
**A:** Oh, yeah. It's not a matter of "could have." He could have done anything he wanted. A producer on *Giant* was going to sign him to direct *The Actor*, which was sort of a cheap paperback novel. That's where I started thinking about it. Jimmy said, "You gotta go out and take photographs, learn about art, learn about literature, even if you want to be an actor."

I carried a camera with me wherever I went. That's how friends related to me, as The Tourist. "Here comes The Tourist." I had a problem—or thought I had a problem—communicating. So it was a lot easier for me to focus a camera on somebody than to deal with one-on-one communication. When I started directing *Easy Rider*, I stopped taking pictures. I didn't think that I could write, act, direct, and concentrate on taking photographs at the same time. Because for years that's all I did.

I did some stuff for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. I did some mother-daughter fashion stuff. Because I was in California, I could get away with things. I could shoot at a bus stop rather than in a studio. I did a series of musicians for *Vogue*: the Lovin' Spoonful, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, the Byrds.

When I started out taking photographs, I did abstract things, like walls. That was what I considered my serious work, because people photographed me and I considered it an intrusion. And then I got into my Decisive Moment, Cartier-Bresson thing, where I would see a composi-

tion in the street and wait for something to happen in it. So I did a series in New York.

I was sort of a gallery bum; I always hung around art galleries. Irving [Blum], who ran the Ferus Gallery out here, asked me to start shooting some of the artists for their announcements. He gave Andy Warhol his first show, Roy Lichtenstein, the whole pop movement started out here before it hit New York. So I'd take the artists out to where I thought the light had some meaning to their work.

I have a book coming out called *Out of the '60s*. It's the photographs I took from 1961 to 1967. Artists and civil rights and love-ins. Sixties stuff. I have a bunch of photographs in the closet here. [Hopper's closets are lined with photographs of artists.]

**Q:** Who were the significant influences?
**A:** When I was a kid it was Orson Welles and John Barrymore. Then in 1952 I saw Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift in movies in the same week and it changed my life tremendously. *Place in the Sun* and *Viva Zapata!* My thinking about acting changed from this grand, classical kind of thing to trying to figure out what was an internal actor and what were these people doing.

Then meeting James Dean, certainly. I saw the work close at hand. There was a lot more to the picture than meets the eye. Dean was working in areas that were way over my head. He was doing things that weren't written. He was working internally and externalizing real feelings. He was doing things you don't really see—except for maybe Crispin Glover [in *River's Edge*], who does such bizarre, strange things, almost like a dancer. Jimmy was like that. He had a tremendous emotional life going on. This is at a time in the fifties when actors only did the script. But Jimmy did the script and then some. Like in *Rebel Without a Cause*, when they arrest him for being drunk and disorderly, they start searching him and he starts laughing like they're tickling him. Or making the siren noises. There was nothing written about that.

Those things changed me. As far as artists, I think Marcel Duchamp. He said the artist of the future will not be a painter but a man who points his finger and says, "That's art," and it'll be art. Duchamp was certainly the greatest thinker of twentieth-century art, as far as innovations. I think Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning and the whole Abstract Expressionist movement was the first time America had an art form of its own, as far as painting goes. Watching that as a kid, I was an Abstract Expressionist before I knew there was such a thing.

**Q:** As an actor you weren't often getting away with such abstractions. There were your famed contretemps with director Henry Hathaway, for instance.
**A:** Hathaway changed my life a lot. I did three movies with Hathaway. I think by this time everybody knows the problems I had with him. But he hired me twice again. And I learned a lot from him. First, you've got to listen to the director if you want to be good in his movie. If you want to be *in* his movie. I had the big fight with him on *From Hell to Texas* [1958] and I was bad. It was like I was in another movie. In *The Sons of Katie Elder* [1965] and *True Grit* [1969], I hated my performance, but I did what he said.

The point is, Hathaway couldn't communicate. He never moved his camera, but he would give you very awkward things to do, very odd movements. But his whole film was like that, and if you're out of step with the film, then you're . . . out of step with the film. And he was a screamer-yeller-maniac. But he made his movies.

**Q:** And you couldn't appreciate it at the time?
**A:** At the time, somebody screaming-yelling at you to imitate Marlon Brando is not my idea of a great director. And he wants you to do every gesture he gives you. It's like a schoolmarm. So we had a hassle and I ended up doing eighty-nine takes or whatever. And never working again, for a long time, because I was blacklisted.

I could only do television for years after that. I guest-starred in over 140 television shows. *Wagon Train*—ah, God—*Cheyenne*, *Sugarfoot*, *The Defenders*, *Naked City*, I mean, every television show. My personal feelings about it? I was doing incredible work. I think it's unfortunate that these things weren't saved. I had some great experiences. Natalie Wood and I starred in a *Kaiser Aluminum* directed by George Roy Hill. Did a great *Studio One* with John Frankenheimer. I was doing leads, and great work. But obviously I wanted to do films. And I wanted to direct.

Hopper's opportunity grew out of the burgeoning film scene sponsored by Roger Corman's speedy cheapos at AIP. His friend Peter Fonda had scored with *The Wild Angels*, and Hopper had starred in a wholesome embroidery called *The Glory Stompers*. Scuzzy though they might have been, the motorcycle flicks were hugely profitable. The movie poster alone of Peter Fonda sitting on his *Wild Angels* chopper sold something like 16 million copies. But while they knew a huge market was out there, both had resolutely sworn off doing any biker movies.

Then Fonda came up with the idea of doing one as a modern western: *Easy Rider*. With its apocalyptic-blast-of-doom finale (which was then as necessary as an ersatz-*Rocky* finish is to an eighties movie like *Hoosiers*), the $420,000 film brought in a fast $40 million. These shattering profits, coming at a time when Hollywood was swamped by $20 million flops like *Star!* and *Hello, Dolly!*, helped bring about the era of interesting filmmaking that existed in the early seventies.

**Q:** Your cut was 7 percent of the gross. Did all that money and success throw you a curve?
**A:** No, what threw me a curve is that I went and made *The Last Movie* right after. I didn't take a break. I won the Venice Film Festival for *The Last Movie*, and it's a movie I'm proud of. But I overestimated my audience. I'd gone around to universities selling *Easy Rider*, and everybody was saying, "We want new movies, we want new movies." I said, "Boy, have I got a movie for you."

In point of fact, what they really wanted was 1940-opiate kind of movies where they didn't have to do a whole lot of thinking—what Spielberg and Lucas came up with. But I didn't even get the opportunity to go that far. Universal said they wouldn't distribute it but for two weeks in Los Angeles, three days in San Francisco, and then they'd shelve it. It never even played in New York, where I wanted it shown. So there went my career as a director. I never even got a third time at bat until *Out of the Blue*, which I made in four weeks and two days.

I should have stopped and not made *The Last Movie*, which was the first film I'd written [in collaboration with Stewart Stern, who had written the screenplay for *Rebel Without a Cause*]. I should have made a more linear film, something more easily understood at the time.

Also, I'd left Los Angeles. I'd moved to Taos, New Mexico. Did my editing there. Never came back, until recently. It's like, any story they want to tell about Dennis Hopper, some are true, some are not. There was no Dennis Hopper around to defend himself. I wasn't around. I didn't have anything going. The only work I could get was in Europe. I can't say I wasn't angry and upset during that time, because I was.

**Q:** So there are two perspectives to your career: the not-sober and the sober one.
**A:** This is true. However, so were a lot of other people who were successful during that period of time. They were going through the same changes and mood swings and were very successful and still are today. Their

personal lives might be even more messed up than mine was. Fifteen, sixteen years is a long time to not have been directing movies.

**Q:** The new project, *Marked for Life*, would be produced by Fred Caruso, who did *Blue Velvet* and *Once Upon a Time in America*.
**A:** It takes place from 1944 to 1965. It's about four kids who tattoo themselves between the index finger and the thumb. Three of them stay in the old neighborhood, the Italian district in Philadelphia, and one guy comes back twenty years later. One's a construction boss, one's a guy who wanted to be a Frank Sinatra–type singer and is now a bagman for the Mafia. The Irish guy's a crooked cop on the street. It's basically about these four guys trying to get back together. But it's not a Mafia-type picture.

I read a lot of scripts, and it's the only one I couldn't figure out by page twenty what was going to happen. I didn't know until the last line what was going to happen. But even though I like this project, it's not really what I want to do. I'm not interested in doing period things. I want to do things about now. That's my forte.

**Q:** What would you like to do most of all?
**A:** I'd really like to do a drug picture. It's not a popular time, everybody's going around saying, "We don't do that anymore." They don't want to use that as a device to show the underbelly of Los Angeles, Hollywood, Beverly Hills. It's all over, from wealthy people to poor people. Show the street gangs, the Valley gangs, the barrio gangs. Show the producers, the rock stars, the musicians, that whole area. Use a surfer as the key figure.

I've talked with various people, but they just hang up; they don't want to be associated with a drug picture. But in point of fact, it's a perfect time to do it. Now is the time to do it. The country's a mess anyway, and they're putting out that they're not going to make a movie about it.

**Q:** What led to your own sobriety?
**A:** What led to it? I was a mess, hearing voices, going crazy. I was incarcerated. You don't know whether you're going to get out or whether you're going to stay in. The only way to get out is to be sober and sane. Or else be in-sane and in-side.

I was in New Mexico, Houston, Austin, Mexico. I ended up here. I heard voices. I heard my friends being murdered in the next room, that shit. Three years ago.

I was doing half an ounce of cocaine every few days. I was drinking like a half-gallon of rum, then a couple bags of coke to sober up. And I wasn't like falling down drunk and wondering where people were. I was pretty straight when I made *Rumble Fish*.

**Q:** On *The Osterman Weekend*. . .
**A:** I wasn't drinking. I don't think I was drinking.

**Q:** You were pulling on a beer and a joint at the same time.
**A:** Was I? [Laughs] I was trying to get sober. I had tried to stop when I came on that picture.

**Q:** When did you finally say, "No more"?
**A:** When I ended up incarcerated. And hearing voices out on the telephone lines. It was a progressive trip. The hard part is getting over your obsession. I'm over that now. I don't give a fuck if you put a pound of cocaine on the table, I don't want it. People drinking doesn't bother me. I have no desire to drink. I have no desire to alter my mind in any way. I don't want to open my mind; I'm lucky I have a mind to open up.

Actually, [*Easy Rider* producer] Bert Schneider got me out. I was in a lockup for the drug situation. I couldn't get out. I was taken out of there and put in Cedars-Sinai Psychiatric. Bert said, "Come on out to the house." I'd still be there if it weren't for him, who knows? I was pretty lucky in that there was no kidney or liver damage. Just the mind went. It's really amazing when the telephone wires start talking to you.

**Q:** One way to reprocess all that turmoil is to act it out in pictures. In all these recent screen roles, you seem to have cast aside any vanities.
**A:** Yeah, well, my personality was never my forte. Most of the time it got in the way, you know, in my dealings with people. I really admire Jack. [Only one man simply goes by the name "Jack," and that would be Nicholson.] Not only is he a wonderful actor, but he's a great personality. He's great at selling himself, and I have a difficult time doing that. I'm not terribly amusing or quick-witted. But Jack isn't vain. He's a joy to be around; he's intelligent, bright, witty, and he's fun. These things I'm not. And these are things that sometimes get you work in movies.

I'm lucky to be working, man. When I first came to Hollywood, 98 percent of your stars had three years of working. Now I've never really seen myself as a star, you know, but you can go from Edmond Purdom to

Tab Hunter to . . . who was the guy in *West Side Story*? Richard Beymer. You can go on and on with these people. A lot of them are not even working.

Take Dean Stockwell. Dean is a wonderful actor. He has difficulty getting work—after all the films he's done. A guy like Russ Tamblyn, who is very talented, I don't think he's had any work in five years. I find that really sad.

A year ago, Dennis Hopper was planning to sit down with a writer and prepare his autobiography. Mention it to him now and he blanches and withdraws. "I just felt that I couldn't do it," he says at last. "The more I thought about it, the more I thought that it was not the time for me to be honest about my life. I thought that maybe it would be better to have a career for a while first!" He laughed suddenly and continued: "I mean, I'd have to deal with a lot of stuff in an autobiography. Or *not* deal with it. And I'm just not the kind of person who can not deal with things. It'd be more painful *not* to tell the truth.

"What would be difficult to deal with? Uh, drug dealing. Relationships. My look at the things that happened. Guns, etc. It's just not the time for me to look at that. I'd much rather work." A hopeful smile came over him. "Otherwise, I would feel that I cheated myself. It's not a pretty story and I don't feel at this time that it would be conducive to my career!" He laughed again in that boyishly infectious way. "Or healthy."

There is no doubt that someday biographies will be written about the long, strange voyage of Dennis Hopper. Like John Barrymore, his life is the stuff of legends. But unlike John Barrymore, who was resolute in his embrace of oblivion. Hopper is showing that a living legend can keep on living. Even with all that past, he can still look for a future.

# True Colors

Bill Kelley/1988

From *American Film*, March 1988. Reprinted by permission of the American Film Institute.

After *The Last Movie* in 1971, Dennis Hopper couldn't get hired in Hollywood to direct traffic. According to Hopper, Universal viewed the film—with its nonlinear narrative and flirtation with abstract expressionism—as "an attack on Hollywood." (His only other directorial job since was the 1982 Canadian production *Out of the Blue*.) The bad rep that Hopper assiduously nourished made it hard for him to get work even as an actor, except for some independent and foreign productions, until his much-ballyhooed comeback in 1986 with *Blue Velvet*, closely followed by *River's Edge*.

Now Hopper is directing again. Last May, he wrapped principal photography on *Colors*, a $9-million-plus melodrama about cops and street gangs starring Sean Penn and Robert Duvall. The title refers to the jacket insignia, or "colors," that identify the gangs.

Hopper has recently joined the Directors Guild, and seems set to follow his friend Warren Beatty's advice: "You shouldn't be working for other directors. You should be directing yourself."

**American Film:** Were you nervous about directing, having been away from it for a long time?
**Dennis Hopper:** No, I've been ready for a few years. I've been close before, but the deals never happened. If I had a dollar for every meeting I've had in the last few years about directing . . . [*laughs*].

**American Film:** Does it take you back to *Easy Rider* at all?
**Hopper:** Well, *Easy Rider* was a very simple film—all direct cuts, noth-

ing flashy. If you can't direct-cut a film, your story's in trouble. Frankly, I learned a lot about directing from [Henry] Hathaway.

**American Film:** But you fought with him a lot, didn't you?
**Hopper:** I had a small part in *From Hell to Texas*, in 1958, which he directed. We argued all day and then had a wonderful time at dinner. He was a primitive director—rarely moved his camera, he'd have movement come from the actor—and he gave me line readings that were imitation Brando crap. I'd try to reason with him, and he'd snap, "Kid, that's dinner talk." I walked off the set three times.

One day, he pointed to a huge stack of film cans, and said, "Kid, there's enough film in those cans to shoot for three months, and we're gonna film this scene until you get it right." I don't know how many takes we did—I say eighty-six because I was really eighty-sixed when we were done—but Hathaway finally wore me down and got what he wanted. He said, "You'll never work in this town again." And I didn't do a major Hollywood picture for several years.

**American Film:** What led to your being hired to direct *Colors*?
**Hopper:** Sean Penn wanted me to do it. I had met him briefly once before, when his brother Chris was doing *Rumble Fish* with me in 1983. We met again a few years later, and I told Sean I thought he was the best young actor in films today. We found that we had a mutual liking for Charles Bukowski, and so when Sean was discussing doing the lead in *Barfly* with Bukowski, Sean wanted me to direct it. I said, "Forget it, you'll never get it away from Barbet Schroeder"—because years earlier, when I was drinking, I'd caused a scene in Ma Maison by telling Schroeder he wasn't qualified to direct movies, that he'd made a couple of nice documentaries and he should stick with that. And it turned out that they *couldn't* get *Barfly* from Schroeder, and Sean said, "Well, then, I'm not going to do it."

I went off and acted in a couple of movies, and when I got back, Sean brought me *Colors*. I met with the Orion people, they knew my work—in part because Orion distributed *Hoosiers*—and it fell together fairly fast, although it was a totally different script than the film we eventually made.

**American Film:** How so?
**Hopper:** The script was about a white cop and a black cop in Chicago, and it involved gangs, but the gangs were selling this narcotic used in

cough syrup. There was a major bust to stop the terrible cough-syrup problem. I said, "Give me a break, man. Make it cocaine, make it real, make it Los Angeles." The powers that be said, "There are no gangs in Los Angeles." I told them, "This wouldn't even make a bad episode of a television show. Why don't you make it an older cop and younger cop, make 'em white, make it about the L.A. gangs? Make it about real stuff?" One of the producers later said, "Hopper came in like a hit man from out of town and destroyed a 'go' project."

Eventually, Sean got another writer, made the changes I just described, I liked it and thought it was now a valid subject, and we began.

**American Film:** Why would a producer say there are no gangs selling cocaine in L.A.?
**Hopper:** Hollywood is very sensitive about movies showing the selling of drugs, or seeming to condone drug use. There'd been a presidential commission against drug use in the media, all of that.

**American Film:** But doesn't the film take a stand against drugs?
**Hopper:** Absolutely. I don't take a firm, preachy stand, but the police obviously do—and the movie's about the police, not the gangs. Although if I'd made this movie on my own. I'd probably have made it strictly about the gangs.

The gangs have a fascinating background. Nobody even knows for sure where their names—Crips and Bloods—come from, though the guy who formed the Crips was a cripple. And the Crips are subdivided into different gangs; they're the only gang in L.A. who kill one another, so you gotta be careful. And then there's the White Fences, a Chicano-Mexican gang that goes back to the turn of the century.

**American Film:** What do a couple of wealthy white guys like Dennis Hopper and Sean Penn know about street gangs?
**Hopper:** Sean got hold of a photographer whose beat is the gang turf. From there, we also went to OSS—Operation Safe Street, of the L.A. sheriff's department—and CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums), which Sean and Robert Duvall work for in our movie. Those are the LAPD cops who go out and deal with gangs every day. It's their specialty.

I went down scouting locations, and got into it fairly quickly. And it was a major effort, 'cause we shot in Watts, San Pedro, Boyle Heights in East L.A.—all the places where these things are really happening.

We shot at a project in Watts that even the police won't go into unless there's a body lying there.

**American Film:** So how does a film crew go in?
**Hopper:** Very carefully. We had a lot of security. There was no trouble while we shot. But I later learned that, in each place we shot, trouble broke out afterward—mainly because gang members would come and watch us shoot and then start something. Once we were shooting a drive-by of a church in Watts—it was of a funeral scene for some members of the Bloods—and two hours later, someone was killed a block away. During the entire production, I would say maybe ten people were killed. But I would not pin that on the making of the film. It's an ongoing thing.

I did one conscious thing: I did not cross gangs. If I was shooting in a Crip area, I'd use Crips as extras. Shooting in a Blood area, I'd use Bloods.

**American Film:** What's the film's tone? Hopeful? Downbeat?
**Hopper:** Well, there's no solution—as people like us know solutions—to the problems these people live with. There's a line the cops say, which isn't in the picture, but probably should be: "There's no solution to this problem, but it's great job security if you can just learn how to live."

**American Film:** The gang movies of the late seventies, like *The Warriors*, were accused of inciting riots in theaters. Are you worried about that at all?
**Hopper:** Yeah, a little bit. The LAPD didn't want me using the real names of the gangs. But the gangs were happy we used their names. They felt it was authentic. If people come out of the theater saying, "Hey, this isn't really going on," they're full of it.

**American Film:** How was Robert Duvall to work with?
**Hopper:** Duvall doesn't say a lot; he comes on the set and isolates himself. I'd watch him, he'd really get into it—all pulled away, talking to himself. You know, generally, when a crew gets its work done, they loosen up and they want to jive with the actor. They don't realize he may still be in character. Some actors can jack around and have a great time, and then you say, "Action!" and they're right back in character. Duvall's not that type; neither is Penn. But it's not that Duvall's unfriendly. There were times he'd warm up to everyone and join in. Still, I told the crew quite explicitly: "Do not bother these men. If they want to talk to you, they'll come up to you."

**American Film:** Was Sean Penn hard to work with?
**Hopper:** Basically, Sean's a very sweet, dedicated guy, but he's got a short fuse. As for me, I never punched out any photographers in a nightclub, but I got involved with some women who could pull my short fuse in other ways. I can understand him.

**American Film:** Do you worry that most Sean Penn films have been box-office failures?
**Hopper:** Well, I hope that this one will be a success. [*Pause*] I think Sean has a way of picking pretty hard pieces. They're good, most of his movies, but he doesn't make the obvious commercial choices.

**American Film:** What do you think about the films you see these days?
**Hopper:** Mostly I like the independent ones. I loved *Sid and Nancy*. As for Spielberg, he has bypassed that sixties sensibility altogether and gone right back into the forties, making entertaining films. I find them a relief in a way. But I'd like something fresh to happen in art, painting, films—although I don't see it.

**American Film:** Do you think you're moving back into the Hollywood mainstream now?
**Hopper:** Well, *Colors* is the first feature I've done as a member of the Directors Guild. I was sponsored for the DGA by the three directors who live closest to me—Tony Bill, Bob Rafelson, and Richard Rush.

**American Film:** Do you have any future directing projects in mind?
**Hopper:** I'd like to do something dealing with corruption and commercialism in the art world—as a serious, mainstream movie. The scene is vast and visual enough. I'd like to follow an idealistic artist who's gradually absorbed into the corruption of how the art world has become a business. It would involve murder, drugs, people who can buy their way in and out of power. On a smaller scale, I'd like to do a little, De Sica–like film about the homeless in Los Angeles.

**American Film:** What gave you that idea?
**Hopper:** Just what I've seen. Again, it would center on one guy. Not a derelict, a bum, or a crazy—but a normal guy who just can't get it together. And all the energy he could put into something else, he puts into just surviving.

I was in Venice one day and I heard a voice yell, "Dennis!" I got out of

my car and looked and there was a guy, in his twenties or thirties, on a sleeping bag on top of a wall. I said, "Do I know you?" He didn't reply, so I said, "How's it going?" And he got this clear look in his eyes and said, "How's it *look* like it's going?" After a few moments, there wasn't any more to say, and I drove away. But don't tell me there isn't a story there someplace.

# Showing His True *Colors*

Rod Lurie/1988

From the *New York Daily News*, April 10, 1988. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Among all the stories written about him over the years, Dennis Hopper can still point to the one article that infuriated him most.

"I was on the cover of *Life* magazine in 1970, holding a football, a flower, and wearing a suit and tie and cowboy hat," he was explaining in a New York hotel room recently. "The first paragraph of the article said, 'Trouble follows Dennis Hopper like a pet anaconda. His friends in Hollywood say that Hopper has drank, swallowed, and shot every drug known to man.'

"At that time, I had never shot any drugs. That really put me back. . . . I couldn't believe somebody could just lie like that."

Shot, swallowed, smoked, whatever, it's all academic. There is little doubt Hopper brought the rumors—many he readily admits were true—upon himself. Not only by perpetuating his bad-boy image in public, but by being the creative mind behind *Easy Rider*, the 1969 sleeper that did for cocaine what *Flashdance* did for MTV.

"I introduced cocaine on the screen for the first time," Hopper says. "Cocaine was not a drug dealt on the street at that time. It was the drug of kings. Two year after *Easy Rider* was released, cocaine was more prevalent on the street than marijuana. That disturbed me when I was trying to get sober. But I can't worry about these things. Yesterday's gone. Right now is here, man."

For Hopper, "right now" is sobriety and film making. On Friday, he releases his fourth directorial effort—*Colors*, a film dealing with Los Angeles gangs. It is a virtual flip side to *Easy Rider*.

*Colors*, which stars fellow Hollywood bad boys Robert Duvall and Sean Penn, does not glorify young hoods or drugs. Nevertheless, Hopper

sets aside the notion *Colors* is an apology for his previous attitude toward drugs.

"Drugs in the sixties and drugs now are two totally different things," he says. "There was a naiveté about drugs in the sixties, and there is no naiveté about them now. We didn't know cocaine was addictive, we didn't know about addictive personalities."

Hopper insists that, ultimately, *Colors* is about gang warfare, and he's armed to prove his point.

He lifts a copy of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* and reads a headline about how the police are out in force against the gangs. Hopper spouts statistics with a deadpan efficiency: There are 70,000 gang members and 570 gangs in L.A. Last year, there were 387 gang-related deaths. There are only 250 police officers dealing with the issue.

"This film pinpoints a problem," he says. "The problem is political, social, economic, and educational, and nobody is going into it."

In *Colors*, Duvall and Penn are cops assigned to a ghetto where gangs hang out (actual L.A. gang members were used as extras). Duvall's character is laid-back and experienced; Penn—surprise—is a hothead. The film is awash with blood and has been criticized by some L.A. authorities for excessive violence.

"You couldn't imagine what our rating (it's rated R) would be had we shown what it's really like," Hopper says. "I spent one night in a squad car and saw more violence than is in our entire film."

He says this is his best movie yet—as an actor or director. Last year, he starred in *Blue Velvet*, the David Lynch film awarded Best Picture honors by the National Society of Film Critics.

"When we were making *Blue Velvet*, I thought it would be great," Hopper says. "But when I saw it, I was disappointed. I wasn't disappointed with my performance, I was disappointed with the final product. . . . There were some not-very-good performances in it.

"If I'd been a reviewer, I wouldn't have given it a good review. I would've pointed out Dennis Hopper's performance. It was great. I would also see tremendous promise in David Lynch. I would also have seen the subconscious and the flow that he was using between the very innocent and the very evil."

When last year's Oscar nominations were announced, Hopper felt certain he would be honored for *Velvet*. Instead, he was nominated for *Hoosiers*.

"I knew then Michael Caine would win," he recalls. "I hadn't paid

my dues. . . . This isn't to say that Michael Caine didn't give a wonderful performance in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. But he's also a socially accepted guy.

"I did vote for myself. I gave a better performance."

Hopper also feels shortchanged this Academy go-round, with Oscars being handed out tomorrow night. "I would've given a great review to *River's Edge* and not pinpointed the great Dennis Hopper performance.

"But I should've gotten a supporting nomination for the film. If I had the time, I would've put money into advertising—and I'm sure I'd have been nominated. I think I deserve it this year."

If Hopper seems a mite self-congratulatory, it's nothing new. "I wanted to be an actor since I was seven . . . I had a contract with Warners when I was eighteen. Either you're a very good-looking guy and they discover you. I wasn't that. I was just a really fine actor. I had no connections, my mother wasn't Hedda Hopper. I got there because I was an actor.

"So at thirteen I was playing Shakespeare. I thought I was the best young actor in the world until I met James Dean. When I saw him, he just blew me away. I had no comprehension of what he was doing."

Perhaps some young actors and directors—particularly the rebels—will say the same of Dennis Hopper one of these days.

# Larry Flynt at Home: Dennis Hopper/Terry Southern

Jean Stein/1990

From *Grand Street* magazine, no. 36 (1990). Reprinted by permission of *Grand Street*.

Good morning, I am your worst nightmare come true: a fabulously wealthy pornographer with the courage and willingness to spend his last dime to expose how you are perverting the Constitution of this great land. Now let's get down to business.

—"Larry Flynt for President" campaign ad, Nov. 1983

**Dennis Hopper:** I decided I was going to blow myself up at the Big H Speedway—something I saw at the rodeo when I was a kid. They called it "the human stick of dynamite." I was convinced that somebody was trying to make a hit on me, and it would be easier to kill me if I was doing this. If I lived through it, then I was destined to live for a while. The stunt man who helped me put the thing together said, "You'll be disoriented for a few weeks." Little did he fucking know. A week later I was in Mexico and I really flipped out. I was on location for a film. They'd asked me to play the head of the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency]. I thought it was just a plot and they were going to get me. Next thing I knew I was walking through the jungle naked. I was convinced everybody understood everything I was thinking.

I ended up in Studio 12, where they took me to recover from the alcohol and drugs and so on. I got an offer from Larry Flynt to do the first celebrity shoot for *Hustler*. I was so out of it, I thought it was some sort of code. It sounded really interesting to me. So Flynt moved me into his house and I became like his top advisor. And here I was, just out of a fucking mental institution. I'd agree with anything he said. "Oh yeah, run for President, sure, why not? Wish I'd thought of it, Larry." In the

beginning I thought he was kidding about running for President. Then he suddenly wasn't kidding. All these sixties radicals started showing up: Stokely Carmichael and, what's his name, Rap Brown would come in. And Russell Means would be downstairs. He was Larry's Vice Presidential candidate. And Terry and Leary and myself, just the most radical people.

**Terry Southern:** Den Hopper called me from Larry Flynt's: "I've sent you a first-class round-trip ticket and I want you to come out. I have a proposition for you. Take my word, it's a good thing. I'll meet the plane." And so I went out without knowing anything except that Den had recommended it.

Den did meet me at the airport and he said, "Man, you're going to dig this scene. This is fantastic!"

When we arrive, the iron gate swings open and they wave Den in. Here I am in this gigantic place, three blocks up from the Bel Air Hotel. I'm trying to think whose house it used to be—Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, or Sonny and Cher, or somebody. Many generations of mismatched celebrities. There were tennis courts and pools on each side of the house with waterfalls and things like that. Well secured—it's patrolled by guys carrying Uzi machine guns. Three uniformed guards outside the fence, and then on the inside three huge bodybuilder types, dressed in white short-sleeves to show off their gigantic biceps. The guards say, "Larry and Althea are resting," which meant that they were just nodded out. So Den and I go up to these fantastic adjoining suites, like something out of the Bel Air Hotel.

Den had become friendly with Althea, who was Larry Flynt's wife. A very curious girl from Georgia, extremely provincial, but with what you might call "keen native intelligence"—a sort of poor-white-trash Whoopi Goldberg. She was heavily into pleasure—obsessed with doing all kinds of things for pleasure—especially all kinds of dope. She had a voracious appetite, but she was an innocent—a babe in the woods without a conscience. In an effort to cool her out, Larry had asked her, "What would you like to do, baby? You name it." She said, "I want to make a movie about Jim Morrison." "All right, you've got it." She consults Den Hopper, and he says: "Well, the person you want to get to write the script is my friend Terry Southern." She said, "Oh, right, good idea." So Den tells me, "We'll write the script together. I already asked them for twenty-five thousand dollars apiece up front." And he hands me this envelope of hundred-dollar bills that thick: "Here, here's yours. I'll show you mine—see, they're the same." "Where should we keep it?" I asked. "I

don't know, I'm keeping mine behind this book. The other day I got so stoned I couldn't remember which book it was. I tore the place apart."

Then we met this one particular guard who, it turns out, is also the chief drug procurer. He says, "Larry's trying to get Althea to clean up, so it's very important not to give her any dope." Then he tells Dennis, "Larry wants to see you in his study." And Den says to me, "I'll see you later. Why don't you just wander around?"

So I'm wandering around the halls and I turn the corner and there's this waiflike girl with wild eyes. She said, "Are you Terry?" I said yes. "Hi baby, I'm Althea," and while we were still having a hug she said, "Are you holding any dope?" When I said no, she said, "I'm surprised there's any friend of Dennis Hopper who isn't holding dope." I said, "Well, I'm not. I just got here and I haven't had a chance. Besides, a guy with a gun has already told me you're not to have any." She said, "Yes, they may tell you that, but they don't know what they're talking about. My doctor said I should have dope or I'm going to stress out."

She said, "I'm so glad that you're going to do the Jim Morrison thing. I'm in love with him. I think he's still alive, don't you?" "I don't know about that," I said, "but his spirit certainly lives on." "Nah," she said, "I mean, he's been seen by a lot of people. He was seen in Venice not long ago"—Venice, California, which is where he used to hang out. "Come downstairs, I want you to meet a friend of mine who's just got here." It was Tim Leary. He very surreptitiously passed her some dope. "Sunshine from the East," he said. "A CARE package from the East." I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I'm meeting Liddy. Liddy and I have been rehearsing here." G. Gordon Liddy and Leary were doing this "debating tour," and they rehearsed their debate at Flynt's. "I don't want to meet him," I said. "He represents everything bad." And Leary just beamed. "Oh, you'll like him," he said.

**Timothy Leary:** You can hate Liddy, but you've got to admire him. When they asked him if he *swore* "to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help me God," you know what Liddy said? "No." Liddy's political attitudes are Paleolithic—he's a cold warrior—but he's got a sense of humor. He has that spunky, cocky, little-guy attitude that Larry Flynt liked. Liddy was having a little trouble with his taxes, so Larry flew him out to be a consultant on security. It was just an excuse on Larry's part to help Gordon out.

**Terry Southern:** The next guy to arrive was Marjoe—you know, that guy who used to be a child evangelist. And the other person who was

a permanent guest for the moment was Madalyn Murray. Madalyn Murray has devoted her entire life to trying to get the Bible outlawed in school. She's a professional atheist, very courageous. For some reason Larry Flynt was interested in her cause. I think he wanted to fuck her . . . mind-fuck her I mean.

> Many of you have said, "I can agree with a great deal of Larry Flynt's philosophy, but not burning the American flag, or desecrating the American flag." More people have died over that rag than any other rag since the beginning of time.
>
> —Larry Flynt, publisher's statement, Rebel, Dec. 1983

**Terry Southern:** About 4:00 P.M. Larry Flynt comes in and he says, "Sundowner time. Time for a sundowner." He's in a wheelchair. His wheelchair is motorized and gold-plated, and it has little American flags like on an ambassador's car. He's wearing this big diaper he had made up from an American flag. "They treat me like a baby," he said, "so I'm going to behave like one. And if I poo-poo in my diaper, I'll be poo-pooing on the American flag." He's trying to explain this to this huge Indian—what the hell is his name? He's a great Indian guy who's about seven feet tall . . . Means, Russell Means. He's there, and meanwhile I hear this shouting, and it sounds like a big argument, but it's just Liddy and Tim Leary rehearsing their act, I mean their "debate." About time for dinner, Frank Zappa arrives, you know him. Quite a grand zany. So there's this very long table of odd people.

After dinner Larry said, "Come into my study, Terry, you're going to need some money for the weekend." We went into his office and he said, "There's a briefcase right by the couch where you're sitting. Put it in your lap and open it." So I did. It was full of packs of hundred-dollar bills. Larry said, "It's a million dollars. I have to have this on hand to give validity to the offer." And he showed me this circular: *A standing offer from Larry Flynt to the following women who are prepared to show gyno-pink. One million cash to: Barbara Bach, Cathy Bach, Barbi Benton, Cheryl Tiegs . . .* They were mostly kind of obscure, but there were one or two that were totally out of place, like Gloria Steinem and Jane Fonda. He was offering a million dollars if they'd pose and do a gyno spread, what he called "flashing pink." And so he said, "Take whatever you think you'll need for the weekend," and he made a point of turning around to use the phone so I could take what I wanted. When he finished his call, he asked, "How much did you take?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"You must be a fool—you could have taken more."

I said, "I don't think I need any more than that."

"Well, I like an honest man," he said. "Do you think Dennis Hopper's honest?"

"I know him well." I said. "He's very honest."

"Well, he claimed he lost the twenty-five thousand dollars," Larry said. "Do you believe that?"

"I think he found it again," I said. "Didn't he tell you?"

"Oh, that's right," he said, "he told me."

It must have been that night, I got a call about 3:00 A.M. "Terry? Althea. What are you holding?"

"I'm not holding anything."

"Dennis told me you were holding. I've got to have something, baby, I'm stressing out."

I said, "Well, let me speak with Dennis."

"I just spoke to him and he claims he doesn't have anything, but I don't believe him."

So I went to Dennis and I said, "Why did you pass her on to me?"

"Well, I don't know what to do about this," he said. "Here, I've got one joint, give her this."

"Why don't you give it to her?" I said.

"I'm not dressed."

"Well, if you think it's all right . . ." So I went out in the hall, and sure enough, there she was, in a weird white lady-of-the-lake nightgown, and she rushes up, and I'm just about to give her the joint when I see this huge security guard, Hans is his name. Monstro-Kraut. She said, "Drop it down the front of my gown and he won't see it." I did, but it fell right through. She was a bit on the frail-knocker side. "It fell on the floor," I said. So she put her foot on it, she's standing on it.

Meanwhile Hans says, "Is there any trouble?"

"Oh no, just having a little stroll here, and bumped into Althea here." Meanwhile she's trying to pick up the joint with her toes, you know. I mean absurd.

He looks down and says, "Wait a minute, I'll help you."

"No, no," Althea said, "I don't need your help. When I need your help, I'll ask for it."

"All right, all right. Have it your way. But I know, I know." And so he turned and left.

The next day Larry Flynt sent for me. "Althea is in no condition to talk

about her projects because somebody's been giving her drugs. Do you know anything about it?" "No," I said, "I don't know anything about it." "Hans said that he saw you passing her dope in the hall, passing it from your foot to her foot. He says that you keep your dope in your shoe. He says your shoe is your stash." I said, "Well, Dennis Hopper's going to have to explain all of this." Meanwhile, as a joke, I had written on a piece of paper right above Dennis's bed: "Rise and shine, Hopper, we've got some tooting to do!"

Larry Flynt couldn't function from the waist down. As long as he kept certain nerves alive, he had a theoretical chance of regaining the use of his limbs. Finally the pain got so bad that he was advised to have this operation whereby they severed these nerves. But during this period the pain was terrific, so he actually had a prescription for morphine and had developed quite a little oil-burner of a habit. Althea was constantly plotting to steal it from him. So Flynt decided to put a permanent guard on his stash of M. He had tried to hide it every night, like Dennis hid his twenty-five thou, but he would forget where he'd hid it. He had periods of great lucidity and then periods where he wouldn't know what was going on.

INTEROFFICE
To: All Employees
From: Larry Flynt
Date: September 29, 1983
re: DRUG USE

I am aware that the use of drugs, especially cocaine, is widespread within this company.

I am giving each of you an opportunity to stop doing drugs. The company will cover the expense of treatment for anyone who wants to be helped.

If you don't seek help and I find out that you are using drugs, you will be terminated immediately, regardless of what your position is.

**Terry Southern:** Meanwhile, the Jim Morrison project was in a shambles. Nobody had bothered to look into anything like the rights. I told Althea, "Well, we're having a little problem with the rights. You have a few lawyers, I understand. Could we put one of them on trying to sort out the rights to this story? We're going to have to get an agreement from each of the Doors, or else we can't use the name 'Jim Morrison,' we can't use the music." She looked so despondent that I felt obliged to

come up with something. "Maybe we could do it in such a way that everyone would know it's really about Morrison," and she said, "Oh yeah, I can dig it, I can dig it. It might be interesting to do it that way."

Althea was the producer and she wanted to meet some movie stars. She said, "Let's have a party and get some P.R. going for the Jim Morrison project. Now I want you and Dennis to make up a list of all the movie stars you can think of and invite them to the party." And Larry wanted to publicize his million-dollar offer for celeb-pink, so he wanted the attaché case full of cash there for the photographers and journalists to feel and photograph. At first Althea said, "I think that's going to cheapen the Jim Morrison Story aspect of it," but Larry said, "No, it won't. A million dollars cash don't cheapen nothin', baby."

> If elected, my primary goal will be to eliminate sexual ignorance and venereal disease. Every ounce of strength I can muster, both physically and psychologically, will be used courageously and endlessly to remove the massive repressive hand of government, the ruling class, from the crotch of the American people.
>
> —Larry Flynt, presidential candidacy announcement, Oct. 16, 1983

**Terry Southern:** Dennis and I were there about three weeks. He did his shoot for the *Hustler* series called "Celebrity Porn" where a movie actor is invited to set up an erotic storyboard. Den, being a poet of the lens, shot it himself. He created a gallerylike situation with some paintings he had done, and then he had these girls posing on a couple of settees. Two girls doing lez-type lovemaking, with some of his paintings in the background. So it served his sort of aesthetic purpose. And a big photograph of him. I was there for part of the shoot. Hot stuff at first, then it got too predictable.

**Dennis Hopper:** I'd made a precedent: I established that this simulated sex was OK, but not in my pictures. It was going to be real. So if they were going to send me women who weren't really interested in doing it, I wasn't interested. They sent me in about ten women. I'd get them in the room, and they'd take off their clothes and they'd say, "But we only do simulated sex." Finally Flynt had them bring in the guy who'd been sending the girls over, and the security guard starts hitting him with a stick and pounding him. Then he takes out a .45 and says he's going to shoot him if he tries to run. And Flynt is yelling and screaming. Terry wouldn't look, he didn't want to see it. I was watching. "Nothing's hap-

pening," I said, "he's just yelling at him." But it was really weird, it was awful.

Then you start thinking, "How do I get out of here?" I'm living in this house like a monk. Sex must be going on everywhere, but none for me. And Terry and I were sitting there like angels. I swear to God, it's true. I guess we were just the weirdos upstairs. Every time we'd come down, we'd get bodyguards.

> Fuck this court! You deprive me of the counsel of my choice! Goddamn motherfuckers! You're nothing but nine assholes and a cunt!
>
> —Larry Flynt to the U.S. Supreme Court, Nov. 9, 1983

**Dennis Hopper:** I got up one morning and turned on the television, and I swear to God they said, "The Flynt house is surrounded." It's all over the news media that we're surrounded by Feds! There are helicopters everywhere. They were after the tapes. Flynt had gotten the DeLorean and Alfred Bloomingdale tapes, and Reagan tapes supposedly. He had made a statement that he was going to shoot the first Fed to enter the gates right through the throat—not between the eyes but in the throat, where they suck cock, or some bullshit.

I got dressed quickly. I went downstairs and found one of Flynt's bodyguards, a guy who'd been a Green Beret in Vietnam, a killer, a stone fucking killer. I said to him, "Is there anything I can do?" "Yeah. Put this grenade in your mouth and run the wall. Or go back to your room." I said, "Yeah, well I'm back in the room. Anything you need, I'll be up there."

I went to the room, tried to calm myself down, did some more cocaine. Terry was stoned or asleep. I finally got him half-awake. "Oh, it'll be lunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel," he says to me. "We may not be alive!" I screamed. He went back to sleep.

> So move over motherfuckers! This is not the Last Supper. This is the morning after and I am the main man. I hope you don't think I have shown contempt for the Court. I have done my damnedest to conceal it.
>
> —"Larry Flynt for President" campaign ad, Nov. 1983

**Timothy Leary:** At the time, Larry was being fined like ten thousand dollars a day for contempt of court—withholding the source of the DeLorean tapes. One day he hired a bus, and he had twenty street hustlers from the Sunset Strip, all the young ladies in high heels, pay back the

fine in wheelbarrows filled with pennies. It was all being taped and filmed. And then Larry was dragged off to Terminal Island.

**Dennis Hopper:** I got this part to play this CIA guy in Sweden, so I left. Larry went to prison. Althea came in and destroyed the metal detector at the Federal prison in Missouri. So she was put in prison. And then I never saw any of them again.

> After all is said and done, who would you prefer as your next President? A Hollywood ham, an addle-brained astronaut, or a smut peddler who cares?
>
> —Larry Flynt, presidential candidacy announcement, Oct. 16, 1983

# Blood Lust Snicker Snicker in Wide Screen

Dennis Hopper/1994

From *Grand Street* magazine, no. 49 (1994). Reprinted by permission of *Grand Street*.

*On March 17, 1994, I visited writer/director Quentin Tarantino at the Los Angeles house where he was editing his new film,* Pulp Fiction*, a trilogy of stories set in contemporary Hollywood whose cast includes John Travolta, Bruce Willis, Uma Thurman, and Christopher Walken. While his staff had lunch, we talked and took pictures.*
—Dennis Hopper

**Dennis Hopper:** I heard one story, I don't know how true it is, that you started out in a video store.

**Quentin Tarantino:** Yeah, uh huh. Well, it's funny. Actually I started out as an actor. I studied acting for six years—for three years with the actor James Best, then for three years with Alan Garfield. That's been my only formal training. I never went to film school or anything like that. And then—I was right at the point, after studying acting for years and years and years, when it comes time to actually go out and start trying to get a career—I suddenly realized that I really wanted to be a filmmaker, because I really was very different from all the kids in my acting class. I was always focused on the movies, I knew a lot about them and that was always my love. They all wanted to work with Robert De Niro or Al Pacino—and I would have loved to work with them too—but what I really wanted was to work with the directors. I wanted to work with Francis Ford Coppola. I wanted to work with Brian De Palma and I would have learned Italian to work with Dario Argento.

So at a certain point I kind of realized that I didn't want to just *appear*

in movies. I wanted the movies to be mine. And so right when I should have started trying to get an acting career going, I completely changed focus. In the meantime, the only thing I could do was get a job at this video store because of my knowledge of movies. And it ended up being like my college, all right. It's not that I learned so much about movies when I was there—they hired me because I was, you know, a movie geek—but it stopped me from having to work for a living, basically. I could just work at this place and talk about movies all day long and recommend movies all day long. And I got really comfortable. Too comfortable, as a matter of fact. It actually ruined me forever having any real job because it just became like a big clubhouse.

**DH:** Where was this?

**QT:** In Manhattan Beach.

**DH:** How long were you there? How old are you now?

**QT:** I'm thirty-one. And I think I was twenty-two when I first started working there. But I got my college experience at that video store, you know. Not because I learned so much—I don't think you learn that much in college—it's the experience that matters. You're kind of breaking away and hanging out with a group of people, doing everything together and just screwing off.

**DH:** And you had access to all those films.

**QT:** Yeah, oh, that was the terrific part about it. I'd seen a lot of them already, but the thing was that I could watch them over and over again. We had a big-screen TV and we watched films *all day long* in the store. And I'd always put on stuff that I wasn't supposed to put on—you weren't supposed to put on stuff that had nudity or a lot of swear words, you know. But I was watching *Fingers* in the store. And *Ms. 45*, and wild stuff, Roger Corman women-in-prison movies. People would say, "What's this?" "Oh, that's Pam Grier."

Also, because I knew a lot about films and everything, if I wanted to see something, I would buy it. I've been collecting videos since videos came out. And so my collection was able to completely enlarge.

**DH:** So *Zatoichi: The Blind Swordsman*, all those Japanese films, did you already have a knowledge of them?

**QT:** Yeah. Most of the stuff I already had a knowledge of before, but I was able to completely indulge myself. And more important than that, I kind of fancied myself the Pauline Kael of the store. People would come in and I would kind of hold court with them. Eventually—and this was great for the first three years, and a major drag the last two years—people would come in and just say, "What do I want to see today, Quentin?" And I'd walk them through it: "Well, this is *Straight Time,* it's with Dustin Hoffman, it's one of the greatest crime movies ever made," and so on.

I remember—this is really weird—I created a following for Eric Rohmer in Manhattan Beach and the South Bay area. We had all of his films on video. So people would come up to me with *Pauline at the Beach*, or something—because they had those sexy boxes, you know—and ask, "How is this?" And I would feel I had to indoctrinate them on Eric Rohmer. "Well, he's a director you have to get used to. The thing is, actually, I like his films." "Well, are they comedy or are they drama?" "Well, they're not dramas, they're comedies but they're not really very funny, all right? You watch them and they're just lightly amusing, you know? You might smile once an hour, you know? But you have to see one of them, and if you kind of like that one, then you should see his other ones, but you need to see one to see if you like it." The same with Bresson.

**DH:** Or Satyajit Ray.

**QT:** Yeah, exactly. But in particular with Eric Rohmer. So I noticed that they'd rent *Full Moon in Paris* or *Pauline at the Beach*, and then they'd come back and get another one. And, pretty soon, all of our Rohmer movies were doing really, really well. But I could never rent them without giving that preamble. Because if they didn't know what to expect, it's conceivable that somebody just renting something for that Saturday afternoon would think, "What the hell is this?" and flip it off.

**DH:** I was trying to think about this phenomenon that's happening now—at least I see it happening—the new wave of violence in movies. I was thinking of names for it last night. And I thought of "Blood Lust Snicker Snicker in Wide Screen." I don't really know what to call it, but you know what I mean. Could you expound on that a little? What do you think is happening right now? I see you as the forerunner of this. And certainly Sean Penn's films fall into this category.

**QT:** And Roger Avary's *Killing Zoe*.
**DH:** The one you produced? Right, exactly. I mean, there seem to be a lot

of them. Even the *El Mariachi*'s. It's almost like a school of young filmmakers who are all doing this on their own. It's like the Abstract Expressionists—they didn't all get together and say, "Hey, let's paint abstractly." It was the next step on the ladder of evolution, and it's obviously coming out of the history of film and society and into a new thing. It's not film noir.

**QT:** No, it's not. I mean, I've thought a lot about this because it was so weird. It was like when I came out with *Reservoir Dogs* in '92, there just happened to be kind of an explosion of this kind of movie. I mean, I'm doing *Dogs* and Rémy Belvaux and André Bonzel are doing *Man Bites Dog* at the same time, a complete planet away, each of us not knowing that the other one exists. Yet now we're both finished and I was at more festivals with *Man Bites Dog* than any other film.

**DH:** It was at the Yubari Festival in Japan.

**QT:** Oh, yeah, but before that I was at four different festivals with it and it was something amazing. I mean, the films were polar opposites, they were different, but they fit into the same thing.

Apparently when Sergio Leone came out with his spaghetti westerns, they were very criticized for their violence. And his response at the time was something to the effect of, "Well, you know, I get that a lot in America but, oddly enough, Italians don't mind it. You see, Italians tend to laugh at violence. They don't take violence seriously."

Now, actually, the only people in America that take that attitude are black people. They don't let the violence affect them at all.

**DH:** Well, some of us others too . . .

**QT:** Yeah. But that's not the largest percentage. They can hoot and they can holler, you know, and kind of enjoy it for its own sake.

**DH:** How did you and Roger Avary meet?

**QT:** He worked at the video store with me. And he wrote the "Gold Watch" story in *Pulp Fiction*.

**DH:** Yes, oh, he did? That's incredible.
**QT:** Well, we co-wrote it. I wrote that monologue. But the whole boxer story was Roger's original idea.

I've never gotten that analytical about it myself, but, in a way—and this might be too pretentious—what we're reacting to in our movies is the fact that we see a lot of action films and we like them and we respond to them, but more often than not we're disappointed by them. They stop too short. And when I say they stop too short, I don't mean in terms of gore. I could care less about that—and they're pretty sufficient when it comes to that. But they stop too short in terms of balls, or even brutality, when the characters would in truth *be* brutal.

Oddly enough, novels don't fall short. If Charles Willeford or Elmore Leonard or Jim Thompson decides that the truth of the character should be that he blows a guy away even when he doesn't have a gun in his hand just because he's mad at him—if that's the truth of where he's coming from, that's the truth of where he's coming from. And I kind of get off on that, because I've been starved for it for the last ten years.

So when we get a chance to make our films, we don't want to wimp out; we don't want to disappoint ourselves. We've got a chance to make the movie that we've always been wanting to see and haven't been able to—except for a few stray examples. And almost all of those stray examples weren't recognized at the time. I'm always fighting to defend them. *Blue Velvet* was completely recognized and people looked up to that 100 percent. But, as far as I'm concerned, *King of New York* is better than *GoodFellas*. That is about as pure a vision as you're going to imagine. I mean, that's exactly what Abel Ferrara wanted to do his entire career. It has the polish and the artistry of a pure vision and, at the same time, it's just *full on out* action. When I see stuff like that, my response isn't to go, "ooh," my response is to laugh out loud.

It's like when Roger showed me the rough cut of *Killing Zoe* and I just howled through the whole damn movie. Until he doesn't want us to howl anymore—all the stuff with the old lady, when he's got the gun in her mouth, that's kind of funny, leading up to the point when he actually kills her, and that's not funny at all.

So when I see extreme violence in movies—or like, forget violence, *brutality*, all right, in movies—when it's done the way we're doing it, I tend to find it funny.

**DH:** Yes, yes.

**QT:** I think it's humorous, but it's not all one big joke. I want the work to have complexity. So it's hah-hah-hah, hah-hah-hah, hah-hah-hah, until I don't want you to laugh at all.

**DH:** So it's hah-hah-hah, ouch.

**QT:** Yes, exactly. And then you might even have to think about why you were laughing. And then I want to try to get you to start laughing again. The thing that I am really proud of in the torture scene in *Dogs* with Mr. Blonde, Michael Madsen, is the fact that it's truly funny up until the point that he cuts the cop's ear off. While he's up there doing that little dance to "Stuck in the Middle with You," I pretty much defy anybody to watch and not enjoy it. He's enjoyable at it, you know?

**DH:** Oh, yeah.

**QT:** He's cool. And then when he starts cutting the ear off, that's not played for laughs. The cop's pain is not played like one big joke, it's played for real. And then after that when he makes a joke, when he starts talking in the ear, that gets you laughing again. So now you've got his coolness and his dance, the joke of talking into the ear and the cop's pain, they're all tied up together. And that's why I think that scene caused such a sensation, because you don't know how you're supposed to feel when you see it.

**DH:** I saw it in Paris. Julian Schnabel took me to see it. He said, "You've got to see this movie." And Harvey Keitel had sent the script at one point for me to be in it.

**QT:** Right, to play Mr. Pink.

**DH:** I know. I loved it and I wanted to do it, but I had to do something else. So I went to see it with Julian, and it was *wild* seeing it in Paris, being an American, watching the film with the French. They were reacting and it was wonderful—and *packed*.

**QT:** It did great there. They totally got it. And it was like fun for me because when it comes to *Dogs*, in particular, the filmmaker that most inspired me was Jean-Pierre Melville.

**DH:** Oh, yeah.
**QT:** That's why a lot of us guys just like responded so much to the cinema coming out of Hong Kong—because they didn't have the rules and

the bullshit that we were seeing in American action films. Boom, they'd just go for it, you know.

It's like I keep using the movie *Patriot Games* as an example of an uptight American action movie: It's supposed to be a revenge movie, all right, and as far as I'm concerned, if you're going to make a revenge movie, you've got to let the hero get revenge. There's a purity in that. You can moralize after the fact all you want, but people paid seven dollars to see it. So you set it up and the lead guy gets screwed over. And then, you want to see him kill the bad guys—with his bare hands, if possible. They've got to pay for their sins. Now, if you want to, like, deal with morality after that, that's fine, but you've got to give me what I paid for. If you're going to invite me to a dance, you've gotta let me dance.

But the thing that is very unique, I mean, that is very indicative of American films, in *Patriot Games*, is the fact that the bad guy actually had a legitimate reason to want revenge against Harrison Ford. He caused the death of his brother. So he actually had a legitimate reason to create a vendetta against him. But the studio was so scared that we would even identify with the bad guy *that much*—to the point of understanding his actions—that they turned him into a psychopath. I never thought that he was a psychopath, and it took legitimacy away from what he was doing.

Then he bothers Harrison Ford so much that now Harrison Ford wants revenge. So you've got these two guys who both want revenge, which is an interesting place to be. But then they get into this stupid fight on this boat, and they do the thing that my friends and I despised the most: Harrison Ford hits the guy and he falls on an anchor and it kills him. And it's like you can hear a committee thinking about this and saying, "Well, he killed him with his own hands, but he didn't really mean to kill him, you know, so he can go back to his family, and his daughter, and his wife and still be an okay guy. He caused the death but it was kind of accidental." And as far as I'm concerned, the minute you kill your bad guy by having him fall on something, you should go to movie jail, all right. You've broken the law of good cinema. So I think that that is a pretty good analogy for where some of these new, relentlessly violent movies are coming from.

**DH:** Right. Well, there's a long history of these films. But they're taking a new approach and I'm very happy about it. What was that film I saw the other night with Gary Oldman?

**QT:** Oh, *Romeo Is Bleeding*.

**DH:** I laughed straight through that movie, I loved it. I came out of the theater and I said, "Man, this is entertainment. If this film doesn't make it, I'm in deep shit." And I loved your movie the other night, your new film, *Pulp Fiction*. I mean, when Travolta is talking to the kid in the back seat, and then just blows his head off . . . it's outrageous. All the acting and the switches and the changes in the writing are just so wonderful.

**QT:** I guess if you're going to draw a parallel to the kind of comedy that's coming out in *Pulp Fiction*, I guess it's actually not very dissimilar to Monty Python—except that it's ridiculous in a more realistic way. You know, in *The Holy Grail* when the guy says, "Do you want to fight about it?" and the other guy cuts off his left arm, and the first guy still says, "Fight me," so he cuts off his right arm. And he still says, "Come on, it's a mere flesh wound, fight me, you coward!" So he cuts him in half and he still says, "Yeah I'll fight you, I'll take you on."

**DH:** It has all that, but then it has a reality to it that takes you to another place where you say, you know, this does really happen on some level, somewhere.

**QT:** See, to me, that's where the humor comes in, in particular in the third story in the movie. It deals with the reality of, okay they've accidentally shot this guy in this car, and now the car's covered with blood. They've got to deal with that. They're going to get picked up by the cops. They're in the Valley and the cops are all over the place there.

**DH:** They've got to get the brains and the blood out of the car—Harvey Keitel comes to do the clean-up, and they throw a party because they only have forty minutes to get it cleaned up.

**QT:** Before his wife comes home.

**DH:** Well, I feel that right now you're one of the top five young filmmakers. You remind me a lot of Francis [Ford Coppola] when he was young and excited and writing and creating. It was great to act your words, man.

**QT:** Well, as far as I'm concerned, you know, you and Chris [Walken] to-

gether in that scene in *True Romance*, that should go into a time capsule for future generations to look at.

I remember after Roger typed up *True Romance* for me, and we knew you lived in Venice, and we knew your house, we drove by a couple of times and we thought about. . . . Well, we were too embarrassed by the idea of knocking on the door and putting it in your hands and saying, "Hey, would you like to direct this?"

So we talked about the idea of just like throwing it at your house.

**DH:** Well, if you have any more of those—throw 'em. (*Laughter.*)

**QT:** One of your performances that's one of my favorites—it's a wacky, kooky performance—is in *The Glory Stompers.* I loved you in that. You know, that is the beginning of you as Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* right there.

**DH:** *Glory Stompers* is the American International Pictures movie which, actually, I ended up directing. That was my first directorial job because the director had a nervous breakdown.

**QT:** No, really? I'm a big biker movie fan anyway. But *The Glory Stompers* is really cool, because it looks like you're improvising it throughout the whole thing.

**DH:** Oh, yeah. I drove the guy to a nervous breakdown and then I took over the picture.

**QT:** You have this one line that's just so fucking funny in it: when you're fighting this guy, you beat him up, and then you look around and say, "Anybody else got anything else to say? Turn it on, man, just turn it on." (*Laughter.*)

**DH:** Well, thank you, man, because I know you're right in the middle of editing.

**QT:** No, this was my break. I'm honored that you wanted to do this.

# Dennis Hopper On His Best Behavior: Iconoclastic Actor Is a Far Cry from Menacing Roles

Jay Boyar/1994

From the *Orlando Sentinel*, June 19, 1994. Used with permission of the *Orlando Sentinel*, copyright 1994.

Dennis Hopper, OK.

You're thinking sharp claws and bad temper, right? So far off the wall that he ain't even in the room?

But that Dennis Hopper—the flaky menace you sense behind the monstrous fetishist in *Blue Velvet* or the sociopathic bomber in the exciting new *Speed*—is not the man who showed up for a tribute at the third annual Florida Film Festival.

The Dennis Hopper who flew into town this month, took his three-and-a-half-year-old son to Walt Disney World, and pecked at questions from the sold-out tribute audience at Enzian Theater was a man on his best behavior. An iconoclast still, but an almost disappointingly genial one.

Sure, he occasionally made the kind of sounds you'd expect from the mouths of loons like *Blue Velvet*'s Booth or *Speed*'s Payne. He could not, for example, withhold a bitter squawk about the botched distribution of *Chasers*, the entertaining Hopper-directed "mindless romp" (his phrase) that came and went this spring.

But if the legendary actor-director-writer-icon wasn't quite lovey-dovey at the Maitland art house, he certainly didn't seem cuckoo or predatory. When an admirer praised his fiendish *Blue Velvet* alter ego, Hopper set the tribute audience straight.

"I wouldn't like to party with Frank Booth," he cautioned, his oracu-

lar eyes looking more owlish than hawklike under his crest of gray hair. "He's a pretty scary guy."

Just before gliding out to greet the tribute crowd, Dennis Hopper had taken time for a quiet chat about his high-flying career.

His attire that evening was what you might call rebel-formal: black suit, black shirt, black tie, black shoes. Peeping out from under his pant legs were black socks with bright red dots—visible evidence of the rare, wild bird lurking beneath.

With someone as complex as this fifty-eight-year-old pop-culture hero, it's often best to establish neutral territory—like movie trivia.

Obligingly, he confirmed that—contrary to what is often reported—his first film appearance was not in the famous teen-angst drama *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Just before making that classic, Hopper spent a single day filming a small role for a forgettable *High Sierra* remake, *I Died a Thousand Times*.

"I had three lines in it," he sniffed. But he did acknowledge that the title turned out to have an uncanny resonance for his serial-phoenix career.

It's the stuff of Hollywood legend that when Hopper was a young actor, he had a run-in with director Henry Hathaway on the set of *From Hell to Texas* (1958). The grizzled veteran fixed the upstart with a stare and growled those immortal words: "Kid, you'll never work in this town again."

But Hopper was—and is—a survivor. He went on to build a body of work that includes some of the most highly acclaimed, vanguard movies ever made.

"It's amazing," he said, astonished by his own resilience. "Try this," he added, knocking on wood. "How'd that sound?"

The revolutionary *Easy Rider* (1969) was the first major comeback for Hopper, who had crashed and burned soon after acting in *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant* (1956) with his idol, the doomed James Dean. An immoderate lifestyle preceded another crash, after which he cleaned up and came back again in 1986 with twin successes.

One was *Blue Velvet*—the influential film noir directed by David Lynch, which Hopper noted has been called "the first American Gothic Surrealist" movie. The other was *Hoosiers*, a basketball picture in which Hopper played the town drunk.

The performance in *Hoosiers* even bagged him an Academy Award nomination—his first since being nominated for co-writing *Easy Rider* seventeen years earlier.

With an impressive three-day gross of $14.5 million, *Speed* finished No. 1 at the box office last weekend. After the poorly distributed *Chasers* and such other recent less-than-earth-shaking projects as *Flashback* (1990) and *Boiling Point* (1993), Dennis Hopper thinks of his latest movie as his latest comeback.

"It's a really new kind of film," he proposed. "In a sense, I think it is revolutionary."

It's the movie's minimalist approach to its characters and their backgrounds that strikes him as so unusual. We find out that Hopper's Payne is a vengeful bomb expert who is missing a thumb; that Keanu Reeves' character is a daring cop; and that Sandra Bullock's character is a speed demon.

But that is just about it in terms of character development.

"Now the motivation is the action, is the film itself," said Hopper. "I think that when you look back at this period of time, you will have to look back at *Speed* and say: This is what an action movie really should have been—and was."

Of course, that doesn't mean an actor as imaginative as Hopper hasn't given any thought to the character he plays.

"I think to make these guys really scary, you've got to make them human on some level," he explained. "So they're the guy next door who—whoops!—something went wrong. Then they become scary. If they become just sort of snarling, menacing guys, they just don't have any spirit to them."

And although his bomber is working against Reeves' cop, Hopper feels they have an odd bond.

"There's this strange, ambivalent feeling, that I have a fatherly fix on him," Hopper said. "He's sort of like a son. I admire him. He's my partner in this."

Hopper laughed his familiar abrupt laugh when he confided that he isn't quite ready for the missing-thumb jokes that may dog him after *Speed*.

"I'm sure they're coming," he warily allowed. And he was kind enough to honor a request to repeat a favorite line from the picture—a line in which Payne explains his reason for planting bombs.

"I wish I had some lofty purpose," he crowed, slipping instantly into character. "But, Jack, it's just for the money." Then Hopper admitted that the line has a personal meaning.

"Yeah, I have been known to work for money," he said.

"My Nike commercials, for example, are for the money. But they're so much fun."

Still, Dennis Hopper doesn't seem likely to cash in on the film's success by playing an endless series of mad bombers. In fact, his very next project is something of a departure.

In HBO's *Witch Hunt*—a satire set in the McCarthy era—he plays a private eye called Lovecraft.

"He's the good guy," said Gale Anne Hurd (*Aliens*, *The Terminator*), producer of the movie and also a film festival attendee. This particular hero, she added, is haunted by a mistake he made many years before.

"When you've got a detective—and especially in a satire—you want someone who isn't a cookie-cutter good guy," she reflected. "Dennis Hopper seems like someone who has been through a lot.

"He is not just, you know, another pretty face."

# Dennis Hopper

David Dodd/1995

From *Playing It Straight: Personal Conversations on Recovery, Transformation and Success* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1996). Reprinted by permission of the author.

I had built in such a strong endorsement for drinking and using drugs because, after all, I was an artist and it was okay for artists to do that. All my heroes as painters, poets, or actors were all alcoholics or drug addicts. So to me it was my right, my God-given right, to take and use drugs. It became my task. I had to do it or I would never achieve the things I wanted, so I thought.

That was all fine and good until I got sober and realized that my drinking and using behavior may have been acceptable to me in the past—like John Barrymore and Richard Burton and W. C. Fields—but it was not acceptable in the present. In the present, I look at people like Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep. They are people who don't make a lifestyle of drinking or using drugs. They're doing really fine work and they're doing really fine work with their senses. I had to get sober to really see that. I think that when you start dealing with the arts and people in the arts, it's beyond denial: many people think it's their right. They have to go and seek the bottle. They have to seek the drugs and seek disorienting themselves. That's a tragedy in itself. I think that's a special problem.

The working man and woman are a different deal because they have the guilt right away that they shouldn't be drinking, that they shouldn't be out of control. At a certain age—once they go through their mating period and finding their manliness and getting into enough bar fights—there's a point that they have to grow up. At that point, I think they get into trouble: they get into denial.

I thank God that I got sober because if I hadn't, I guarantee you I would either be incarcerated or dead. I would not be talking to you now.

People have said things to me that were really important through this recovery process: simple things, very simple. I remember when I first got sober. Someone wrote on a chalkboard, probably because of *Easy Rider*, "Easy Does It . . . but Do It!" I think really the most important thing that anybody ever said is, "You just don't drink and you don't do drugs today." It's really that simple. Obviously it can become complicated, but think about it: you just don't drink and you just don't do drugs today. When you look at it that way, it's much easier to comprehend than the thought of not drinking for the rest of your life.

That pretty much gets you through it. It will get you through it because every day you do it, you don't drink. Pretty soon you come out of the fog. You come out of the dependency. You come out of the stupidity of, "I have to have it," "I must have a drink," "I must have some drugs." Once you get out of the "gotta have it" syndrome, your brain starts clearing. You start looking around and seeing things again and realizing who you are and where you are and what you want and what your dreams really are.

You can only do that sober. You can't really do that any other way, not if you're an alcoholic and a drug addict, because there's only a moment when drinking and taking drugs work. After that you're working for the drink and drugs, they're not working for you. I'm talking as a creator. Then pretty soon, if you're really involved in drugs and alcohol, you don't have your senses at all. You don't have any sensibility of your own. You become a schizophrenic, you become more and more paranoid—which you probably were anyway—until you lose sight of yourself.

So the mere fact of just stopping—not drinking and not doing drugs today, and being able to maintain that—causes the rest of the miracles to open up because you start becoming normal again. Your senses quiet down, and your vulnerability, your patience, and your understanding start coming back. Certainly the 12-Step programs are the most important things that I've found anywhere. They really work. Those programs are there for everybody.

I had a manager who thought the way to handle me was to cut me off booze entirely. He told everyone not to give me anything to drink. It's a great idea. However, if you cut off someone who is drinking as much as I was drinking, there are going to be problems. I was drinking a half gallon of rum with a fifth on the side and several beers every day. If you take that amount of alcohol away from somebody immediately, his whole system shorts out. He starts seeing things, hearing things that aren't there and having total hallucinations. They used to call them d.t.'s. I

went into these incredible hallucinations. I thought I was a hologram and I thought that World War III had begun—incredible stuff.

I was shooting a film in Mexico and got into a lot of trouble. Paranoia was really setting in. The police arrested me. A film crew came and rescued me, and they put me on a plane they had chartered to Los Angeles. On the plane I was hallucinating, and I crawled out on the wing in midair. I decided that Francis Ford Coppola was on the plane filming me. I had seen him, I had seen the cameras, so I knew that they were there. The crew started the wing on fire so I crawled out on it knowing that they were filming me. All this was a total hallucination, except climbing out on the wing, of course, which didn't last very long. I was out there and a bunch of stunt men grabbed me and pulled me in.

I had it a lot rougher than most people. I knew that I couldn't go back to using because I would be incarcerated. I went into a treatment center. The doctors put me in a medical unit and gave me a drug called Prolixin. It is an antipsychotic drug, but 7 percent of the population are allergic to it and it gives them Parkinson's disease. I had a psychotic reaction and it gave me Parkinson's disease temporarily.

When the doctors saw that happening, they gave me another drug called Cogentin to take away the Parkinson's. It didn't. It caught me between Parkinson's and whatever. I couldn't make sentences. I couldn't make gestures. I had Parkinson's and I didn't know what else I had. The doctors were taking me from meeting to meeting saying, "Look, this is what happens to you when you drink and use drugs. Here's a living example." I mean I couldn't turn my head. I couldn't make sentences. I couldn't get the cigarette to my mouth. It would take me five minutes to get my hand to my mouth, or to get the cigarette out of my mouth. Unbelievable.

When they finally released me from treatment, I was going back to Taos, Mexico, to kill myself because I was never going to be able to act again. I flew to Las Vegas and told this girlfriend of mine what I was going to do. The treatment program did not allow me to see my personal physician, so she got me on an airplane and flew me back to Los Angeles to see him. He examined me and said, "My God, they didn't give you enough Cogentin." He gave me a bunch of shots of this stuff, and finally he said, "That ought to do it." I got up and I put my hand in my back pocket. I made gestures. I made a sentence: I said, "My God, I'm back."

So mine was a different kind of recovery. When I got back to what I considered some sort of normal after spending four months being in this other hell, there was no way I was going to go out and do any drugs

or have a drink. I had a really hard time during that episode, but it made it a lot easier to stay away from the booze and drugs. I didn't have any inclination to say, "Boy, I'll go to a bar and have a drink now. Wouldn't it be great to have a drink?" or "Wouldn't it be great to have some drugs?" I said, "Thank God I'm back. Thank God it's over." So it was a sort of erase and rewind. The experience had really humbled me, and I had gotten the message.

I was very afraid that I wouldn't be able to do things without alcohol and drugs, but, man, I can do it so much better. My work is so much cleaner. I can utilize all of my senses. Everything is clear now.

I never thought that was possible without drugs and alcohol because, again, I was an artist and that's what artists do. Then you look at the working man, and he looks at his buddies or his coworkers and thinks the same thing: that's what they all do so he doesn't have the problem. It's very acceptable behavior.

I was in Ireland for seventeen weeks doing a film. I love Ireland and I love the Irish people, but they've based their whole society on drinking. They do what they call pub crawls. The women have pub crawls where they go out and go from one pub, and they crawl to the next pub. Their whole society is built on that. It's amazing. It's their way of life. But there are meetings there; there are people who are sober. There are people who don't drink, but the majority of people do drink.

Until you try the other side, you have no idea what you're missing. I didn't. I drank in front of everybody. I did drugs in front of everybody. I just assumed that everybody in the world was doing drugs and drinking. They certainly were around me.

As far as my family and the life that I had, that wasn't why I was drinking. No one was hiring me. I wasn't getting work. I was wondering why people were calling me difficult, but that's not why I was drinking. I was drinking because I was an alcoholic. I started as a kid, you know, hanging out with the guys. In Kansas, we used to go out in the pickup truck and get a bunch of beer. We would all make a circle with the trucks in the middle of a vacant lot or a field, and drink beer. When I was a kid, I worked on the harvest and the farmers used to give us beer because the sun was so hot. They'd feed us salt and the beer to cut the wheat.

When I was eighteen years old, my agent gave me a martini. He said, "This is a martini, extra dry." I went, "God, this is awful," and he said, "It's an acquired taste." Boy I acquired that taste real quickly.

Drinking and drugs change everybody's behavior. They make people unreasonable. Not that we actors are necessarily reasonable people to

begin with, since we work with our imaginations and our senses, but people do get out of control. I don't really see it anymore because I have a history and they know the history; it's a different kind of thing. The other actors check and balance themselves. They still drink in front of me and do all that, but I haven't had a problem with actors getting out of control. In fact, many of the people that I work with are the bad boys and bad girls, so to speak, in the business. They don't give me a problem. I don't preach to them and try to stop them from doing what they're doing because I think that's very bad for the program, for my program. I can't go out and try to convert this world, the people who are drinking and taking drugs, and try to convince them that I have the only way. That's just not my task in life.

These people don't want to get sober. At this point, I'm not about to try to convince them to get sober because it's a losing battle. Something somewhere has to humble them enough or hit them on the head like a sledgehammer so they understand that they *have* to get sober. That's something you can't give somebody. That's something he has to get by himself, or by some power beyond him or in him—whatever—that leads him to the conclusion that he has to get sober. At that point, then I can be helpful. Then he comes and asks for help, which is something that I look forward to, something that gives me great pleasure. You have to be there for people. You need to support people.

Serenity is a personal thing and it's different with everybody. You talk about quiet times like taking time to smell the flowers, taking time to look at the flowers. I notice everybody is speedwalking, they're all speedwalking, they've all got somewhere to go and they have to go there quickly. They're not really looking around. They don't know where they are, they don't know what's going on around them, they just move ambitiously onto the next thing. The next thing will keep them going and driving for that. They're like horses with blinders on: they don't really see their life, they don't see where they live, they don't see what's around them, they don't have any connection with the real feelings of their time or society or family or work. Serenity is taking the time to pause, to meditate, and to make a personal check on yourself. You'll just have a little more understanding of things. Then there's always the possibility that you might become scared again because we live in a miracle. We are a miracle. This whole life and this whole complex society that we live are very humbling. There's so much here to take care of and so much here to do that one needs serenity to keep a balance.

# Dennis Hopper with Tony Shafrazi

Tony Shafrazi/1999

From *Index Magazine*, 1999. Reprinted by permission of *Index* and the author.

Most people know Dennis Hopper for the indelible characters he's invented over more than forty years. His career spans from classics like *Rebel Without a Cause* in the mid-fifties and *Easy Rider* in the sixties, *Apocalypse Now* in the late seventies, cult hits *Blue Velvet* and *River's Edge* in the eighties, to the nineties mega-blockbuster *Speed*. Once you've seen him in these movies, it's impossible to imagine anyone else playing those parts. And when you look back on many of the films that he's directed—*Easy Rider*, *The Last Movie*, *Out of the Blue*, *Colors*—they have an uncanny way of representing the times in which they were made. That's the reporter in Dennis Hopper, the person who always needs to say, "This is what I've seen."

What's not widely known about Dennis is that he's also a photographer. And he's been taking pictures since the early sixties, documenting the art scenes in New York and L.A., urban streets and Hollywood sets, rock 'n' roll bands, bikers, and civil rights marches. He's made definitive portraits of everyone from Brian Jones to Jasper Johns. Dennis always managed to be in the right place at the right time, and, with movies very much in his mind, his photographs show that he can also direct a picture with a still camera.

Until now, only two books of Dennis's photographs have been published.* But thanks to the curator Walter Hopps, who held on to more

*In 1999, at the time of this interview, only two books had been published on Dennis Hopper's art and photography, and it was expected that the large and ambitious monograph with over three hundred images, a complete filmography, and biography which had been in preparation for several years would be published later that same year. Instead, this comprehensive book *Dennis Hopper Photographs 1961–67* was published in 2009 after over eighteen years of thorough research, organization, and editing.

than six hundred contact sheets that Dennis himself says he hadn't seen since the late sixties, a new book is expected by the end of this year. Along with his old friend, the art dealer Tony Shafrazi, Dennis has been poring over thousands of images over the last few years to assemble a comprehensive collection. With their final selections made, we asked Tony to give Dennis a call so we could hear about their project first-hand.

**Tony:** Hi, Dennis.
**Dennis:** They just said "stand by." Is that a "yes," are we running?

**Tony:** Yes, we're running. It's a long time since I talked to you. So what are you doing these days?
**Dennis:** Well, I've been going through the proof sheets.

**Tony:** Great. I did also, and they look wonderful.
**Dennis:** Well, it's a hard process for me, because there are so many people who are dead, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy and so on. I have so many memories.

**Tony:** Are you moving ahead and choosing good images?
**Dennis:** I'm still going through them. I didn't use a light meter; I just read the light off my hands. So the light varies, and there are some dark images. Also, I'm sort of a nervous person with the camera, so I will just shoot arbitrarily until I can focus and compose something, and then I make a shot. So generally, in those proof sheets, there are only three or four really concentrated efforts to take a photograph. It's not like a professional kind of person who sets it up so every photograph looks really cool.

**Tony:** Oh, I think a lot of it looks really cool. And now, after many years of talking to you, and many years of talking to Walter Hopps, we've finally managed to get hold of all the contact sheets, at least the six-hundred-odd sheets that survived, that luckily Walter Hopps kept all this time.
**Dennis:** That I literally haven't seen since the sixties.

**Tony:** And other than the one hundred or so prints that we showed in Europe in '88, we never really looked at all of them carefully.
**Dennis:** You know the one photograph I picked of Andy with the flower—the one where he's not smiling and looking sort of straight at the camera? That's the one that's become a very famous picture of Andy.

But there are two more, another one of him with the flower, but he's now smiling because he's seen me. And there's one with, I think, Barbara Rose's arm reaching for a cigarette. It's a longer shot of him, and he's so handsome, so young. It's 1962 or '63, he's in a suit-and-tie, and he looks really wonderful. And I've never even printed those. Those have never been seen before. And I have so many great photographs of Ed Ruscha that have never been printed.

**Tony:** I told Ed that we are trying to do a big book of your photographs, and he said, "You *should* do a big book! There are so many great pictures. Just tell Dennis you should print all of them, man."
**Dennis:** [laughs]

**Tony:** Well, he's right! You can still have your two-hundred-odd pages of single pictures, and have many others in contact form. It could be the way we're looking at them, slightly more enlarged maybe. I was just looking at some incredible photos of Jane Fonda . . .
**Dennis:** Oh, some terrific shots of Jane. With the bow-and-arrow and the bikini.

**Tony:** And the photos of Phil Spector, who looks like a young Mozart.
**Dennis:** He was.

**Tony:** So there's a lot of stuff there. I think we can play with it, and it will read more like a film.
**Dennis:** You know, the history of California art doesn't start until about 1961, and that's when these photographs start. I mean, we have no history out here. So that's the beginning. I have so many photographs of Ed Kienholz, of Wallace Berman, Lynn Foulkes, George Herms, Bruce Conner.

**Tony:** And you were one of the first patrons, you were collecting art. There's a picture of you in your living room and Ed Ruscha's big gas station painting is hanging there.
**Dennis:** Right. There's a big twelve-foot Standard station, that was the first one. It's a great painting. One of his best.

**Tony:** When Andy had his first one-man show in L.A. at Ferus, which was the Campbell's Soup paintings, you ended up buying one. And they only sold two, I think.

**Dennis:** No, no. Everybody's confused. My whole written history is one big lie! [laughs] I mean, I can't even believe my history. But I did have the first Campbell's Soup painting. It was in the office at Virginia Dwan's, and I bought it for seventy-five dollars from John Webber who was the director of the Dwan Gallery. This is '62 or '63.

**Tony:** I think that in planning this book we have to find a way to keep a bit of the narrative that's there. You were around all the time with the camera. And you can see that in these pictures.
**Dennis:** You have all the Happenings. There's Claes Oldenburg, that Auto Bodies Happening that I photographed, and then Rauschenberg and John Cage, roller-skating with the parachutes, and those big plastic tunnels that were filled with air.

**Tony:** And Allan Kaprow . . .
**Dennis:** With what I call the "Ice Palace." He built these great ice cubicles and then lit torches inside them and let them melt all over Los Angeles. There are wonderful photographs of that.

**Tony:** When I look at your photos, I think of the kind of thing that we all did in the early sixties—where we'd take a camera and shoot off the television set, like all the Kennedy funeral pictures you took.
**Dennis:** Hmmm.

**Tony:** In a way, your images are like a cinema verité of that time. I see a lot of this as an almost naive or cleaner or purer image of the feeling I get when I see *Easy Rider*. You're traveling across this wonderful time and space . . . Your photos give that feeling to me. This isn't just the work of a photographer, but of someone telling a story. You are very much engaged with the subjects—you are part of what is happening
**Dennis:** Yeah.

**Tony:** Now, I guess everybody knows your history in the fifties, after making the great movies with James Dean . . .
**Dennis:** I went under contract to Warner Bros. on January 7, 1955, and I did *Rebel Without a Cause* that year, and *Giant*, I believe, was maybe the beginning of '56. They were made back-to-back, actually.

**Tony:** Where did you come from originally?

**Dennis:** I was born in Dodge City, Kansas. After the war, my father came back, I was nine years old, and we moved to Newton, Kansas. Then we moved to Kansas City, Missouri. When I was thirteen, we moved to San Diego, and when I was eighteen I came to Los Angeles. After I graduated from high school, at the end of that summer in '55, I went under contract. I was eighteen years old.

**Tony:** But you were doing plays in San Diego, right? I seem to remember that you did *Hamlet* and all that stuff.
**Dennis:** I started acting at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego, from the time I was thirteen years old to when I was seventeen. I was doing Shakespeare and plays at the Old Globe in Balboa Park.

**Tony:** You met James Dean in '55.
**Dennis:** Right.

**Tony:** And he had a real passion for art also, and encouraged you to take photographs?
**Dennis:** Oh yeah. He said, "I know you want to be a director some day, so you should start learning how to compose pictures through your camera without cropping them." Because the idea in those days, everybody took photographs and cropped them.

**Tony:** So he liked painting and sculpture . . .
**Dennis:** Absolutely.

**Tony:** I remember as a kid in England around '58–59 seeing pictures of James Dean sort of fooling around . . .
**Dennis:** Oh, he painted.

**Tony:** He did?
**Dennis:** I had a painting of his for a long time, of a Black actor named Billy Gunn, who was a close friend of Jimmy's. They used to meet under the gingko tree on the side of the 42nd Street Library in New York. They'd meet there after class at Lee Strasberg's at The Actors Studio. They used to do sense memories under the gingko tree. Anyway, it's a painting that Jimmy did of Billy Gunn with a saxophone. I had it for years, and then I gave it to Billy.

**Tony:** Wow, you remembered that. Yes, I saw photos of that painting—it was very cool painting of Gunn playing the sax. So he kind of encouraged you to get into art.
**Dennis:** No, he didn't encourage me to get into art. I'd been painting and doing all that way before I met Jimmy.

**Tony:** You still have paintings of yours from that time, right?
**Dennis:** I have a couple. But most of my paintings I lost in the Bel Air fire in 1961, so the only ones that exist are the ones that my father and mother had. I lost everything in that fire, all of my paintings, but I had a show of my photographs that night and the negatives were saved. I tried to start painting again, but I just couldn't get it. And then I started to assemble objects with photographs.

**Tony:** At that time, you weren't making pictures—from '58 to '63? You were blacklisted.
**Dennis:** Yeah, I had gotten in trouble with Henry Hathaway at Twentieth Century-Fox. I had been loaned out from Warner Bros. . . .

**Tony:** Who was he?
**Dennis:** He was the director of *The Sons of Katie Elder*, which I was in. *From Hell to Texas* is the one I got in trouble on—around 1958. Then I went to New York and I studied with Strasberg.

**Tony:** You didn't do big Hollywood movies at that time, but you did the one with John Wayne and Dean Martin . . .
**Dennis:** That was *The Sons of Katie Elder*. And that was when I came back—five years after Hathaway had blackballed me. He rehired me for that picture. It was probably around '64.

**Tony:** So you started to use the camera because you weren't making films?
**Dennis:** Well, I was a compulsive creator, so it became my creative outlet. I was using Tri-X film—which nobody else was using at the time—because I wanted to get as much natural light as possible and be able to shoot everything in natural light without flashes. I was a product of the movie business . . .

**Tony:** Right.

**Dennis:** . . . but I was trying to go another way from the movie business. And I was taking pictures in black-and-white. Everyone else was using color. I was using Tri-X because I could shoot at night, and get shots by holding it real still, with just streetlights and so on. So these were things that I was playing with. But at the same time, a lot of my ideas were glamour ideas, because I wanted people to look good. So my portraits were about them in natural light, looking good, and looking in some way that had something to do with the reality of their world.

**Tony:** You were a young, good-looking guy at the time, from the late fifties, already the famous star that you were. So obviously, whoever you were taking pictures of, they'd respond to you, to your character.
**Dennis:** And I was also a product of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. There are a lot of common objects with the people in my photographs, and a lot of funky, abstract kind of things. There's also the graffiti and the stuff that was around in the streets. Because I was taking people into the streets.

**Tony:** Creating set-ups . . .
**Dennis:** And working around billboards. I was very hung up on billboards. Foster & Kleiser was a billboard company, and I took [James] Rosenquist down to their factory, I took a lot of people down there.

**Tony:** Let's switch gears a little bit, because we should talk about the movies. As long as I have known you, you have had a strong interest in independent cinema. When you were shooting *Blue Velvet* in 1984, I remember you had an idea about those malls, where you have lots of movie theaters . . .
**Dennis:** I was saying that it would be a great idea when people build a cineplex, that maybe three theaters out of the ten could be showing movies besides the current Hollywood releases. One could show independent films, another could show foreign films, and you'd have one just for old movies—so people have a continuity and understand the history of film.

You'd be able to see *Birth of a Nation* or *400 Blows* or *Hiroshima mon amour*, an old Gary Cooper movie, or whatever. And the Italian films, the French films, all the European films. They practically have no industries now anyway. It would give them back what used to be known as the art house circuit, so they can be distributed, have an audience and

make some money here. And independent films in this country are in the same position. Miramax and Fine Line are not independent—they're with Disney! Come on. Or they're with Warner Bros. They're all with somebody.

**Tony:** Right, right.
**Dennis:** The Hollywood way and the quick pace and so on . . . it's great on certain levels, but there's another way of looking at things, too, which is more slow-paced, more realistic, more in tune with the feelings of the smaller stories.

**Tony:** You know who talks about film in the same way? And you don't feel as if it's some young movie star at all—Sean Penn. I remember you saying, "Hey, man, he's a great actor, but wait till you see the movie he directed."
**Dennis:** *Indian Runner*.

**Tony:** Sean acted for you in *Colors*, and you became really good friends. He actually named one of his sons after you, I think?
**Dennis:** Yup. Hopper Jack. For myself and Jack Nicholson.

**Tony:** You kept telling me about *Indian Runner*, and finally, I saw it last week.
**Dennis:** It's a great movie. Great movie. The one with Jack, *The Crossing Guard*, was not successful. It was a terrific idea that I think got really out of hand, and was not clear. But the first movie, *Indian Runner*, is a masterpiece.

You know, this is such a rich time that we've just been involved in, and there's really a job now for historians. Film is still very young. This is the first hundred years of filmmaking. So I think it's important that we have some sense of history and continuity. Especially in film.

**Tony:** But the visual arts are in need of it also.
**Dennis:** I consider the movies the visual arts, too. [laughs]

**Tony:** Hey, wasn't that great, that Ed Harris won a Golden Globe?
**Dennis:** Yeah, it was terrific—with a part I got fired from. [laughs] Now, do you think that historians will know that in *The Truman Show*, with Jim Carrey, that the part Ed Harris played, and we're happy that he won the award for, that I was fired from after shooting one day?

**Tony:** Shit. Oh, man! You were supposed to do that part?
**Dennis:** [laughs] I started it. I did months and months of preparation. I went down and saw Peter Weir twice in Florida. I spent six months on that picture, and then did one day shooting, and Scott Rudin, the producer, who I'd never even met, he never wanted me for the part. He said he would wait for one day's rushes, and if he didn't want me in the picture he was going to fire me—and he did. Anyway, that's my story. But I enjoyed the picture, and I thought Ed was really good in it. I think he's a terrific actor.

**Tony:** He is. And he's a good guy.
**Dennis:** Yup. I like him very much. But it was the first time . . . It was the only time in my life I've ever been fired.

**Tony:** We could leave this out.
**Dennis:** Don't worry about it. It's the reality. What does it matter? And I'm happy for him. I really am.

**Tony:** So what are you busy with right now?
**Dennis:** Well, I met with the people in London about the Robert Fraser book. It's a great history.

**Tony:** It's the whole story of his gallery and his friendships with everybody from Ellsworth Kelly in the late fifties to Andy Warhol and Oldenburg in the sixties.
**Dennis:** And all the Los Angeles artists coming to London for the first time . . . Ed Ruscha and myself, Wallace Berman and Jess Collins.

**Tony:** And of course, he knew all the Rolling Stones. Mick Jagger met Marianne Faithful in his gallery. He's such a pivotal person in London at that time. That book will make an incredible movie, and they're keen on talking about the possibility of you directing that.
**Dennis:** But it's written in interview form. There's quotes from me, quotes from you, from Paul McCartney, various Stones and all the players. So to make a film out of it, it's like where do you start, where do you end—where are you? You've got a bunch of interviews. To make a documentary is one thing, to make a feature film is quite another.

**Tony:** If you approach it in a simple way, it could be done. Otherwise, it could take too much of your life.

**Dennis:** There's no way to approach it in a simple way. I mean, to do this properly, it's going to take two years. And they're not quite sure what they want to do.

**Tony:** Well, the form of it will depend on you. They have all these great interviews.
**Dennis:** Somebody's got to write a screenplay. What they have is more like Jean Stein's *Kennedy Funeral Train*.

**Tony:** Or *Edie*.
**Dennis:** But to make a movie, you've got to figure out who's going to play Robert. And even if you show the paintings that he was exhibiting, and the interviews and music give you the whole flavor of the time, something's still missing. And what's missing in all this is the drama of his life. It doesn't really appear.

**Tony:** I see.
**Dennis:** You know, where's Robert? There's nobody saying, "Hey, I was going through this, man . . ." And what about the times he went off to India, for example, and abandoned art? His voice has to come through. I mean, you can have people talking about it, but it's not the same.

**Tony:** That period of the sixties is also the period of your photographs. You're there with him.
**Dennis:** That's when I photographed Brian Jones, and I took pictures of Robert in Mexico. He bought a lot of incredible folk art in Mexico—The Day of the Dead figures he took back to London. And when he went to India, when he chases the dragon into India, he came back with all those erotic miniature paintings. Did you ever see those?

**Tony:** Yes, sure.
**Dennis:** There's all this wonderful stuff that we can put in a movie, that tells you so much about him. And while people are talking, you can see all this—and show the Jim Dines and the Oldenburgs and the Rauschenbergs and the Warhols and the Ed Ruschas . . . and the Hoppers even. [laughs]

**Tony:** Weren't you just working on a movie in Germany?
**Dennis:** It's called *Straight Shooter*. I play a guy who fought in Vietnam, went in the French Foreign Legion . . .

**Tony:** Will it be a fun movie?
**Dennis:** Oh, it's a great script, wonderful part. But I was the only one speaking English. So when I go to Germany, I'll be speaking German. They dubbed me immediately into German. But it's with all the big stars in Germany. Miramax is supposedly going to distribute it in the United States, and they're going to have it at Cannes.

**Tony:** If it gets distributed in America, you'll be talking in English, obviously.
**Dennis:** Yes. Then it goes back to my soundtrack.

**Tony:** Okay, my man. I shouldn't keep you on any longer.
**Dennis:** All right, buddy.

**Tony:** So listen, I'll talk to you soon, huh?
**Dennis:** Yes, sir.

**Tony:** Much love.
**Dennis:** Bye, bye.

# American Psycho

Lynn Barber/2001

From the *Observer*, January 14, 2001. Reprinted by permission of the author.

A maid lets me in through the steel door, into a sort of auditorium with a large broken sculpture on a stage. It is a Dennis Hopper work called Bomb Drop currently awaiting repair. The seats of the auditorium are all piled high with framed photographs, again by Dennis Hopper, and there is a hologram of a sinister man in silhouette (Dennis Hopper?) overlooking the stage. This auditorium leads into a hangar-like room which has a giant flat-screen television and furniture made of crinkled cardboard. Across the room are several sliding screens for storing paintings, and a steel staircase going up to a walkway above. On the walls all round there is a stunning collection of contemporary American art—an Andy Warhol Chairman Mao, a Basquiat, a Haring, a David Salle, a Julian Schnabel, a Cindy Sherman—several million dollars' worth of prime museum fodder housed in one of the highest-crime areas in the USA.

A young woman introduces herself as Hopper's assistant and asks me to wait. An older woman in running shorts glides through the room and introduces herself as Hopper's mother-in-law. Next, a tiny child-like woman in jodhpurs and riding boots appears from nowhere and nervously introduces herself as Victoria—the current Mrs. Dennis Hopper, the fifth. She says that she is sorry she can't stay but she is going to Topanga Canyon to train her horses. So saying, she walks to the far end of the room where a huge Land Cruiser is parked in the distant gloom, gets in, and starts the engine. A steel wall rolls up, revealing a corridor of metal gates sliding open, and off she drives. It is an incongruously James Bondian exit for such a tiny, fragile-looking woman.

After she has gone and the steel wall has clanged down again, I get seriously spooked. The acoustics of the house are most peculiar—the whole place clangs and throbs like a ship's engine room, there is a con-

stant whispery static from the intercom, and voices and footsteps seem to advance and recede overhead, echoing along the steel walkways and pipes. It is a paranoiac's castle but it also seems designed to induce paranoia—sitting in this blind fortress, it is easy to imagine the *Mad Max* tanks rolling up the street with their battering rams poised, the advance troops of crazies throwing grappling hooks over the roof, the wire cutters and oxyacetylene torches getting stuck into the steel doors.

By the time Dennis Hopper finally appeared, I was fully expecting some gibbering *Blue Velvet* character in a gas mask, and for a moment failed to recognize the small, neat elderly man (he is sixty-four) in navy blue sweater and grey slacks. For the supposedly "scariest man in Hollywood," he seemed disappointingly quiet. His assistant brought us tea but then he decided he wanted to do the interview upstairs, and led me up a clanking staircase across a walkway to another even stranger room, perched on a sort of ledge high up. It had a conventional Christmas tree and a rather kitsch cocktail bar with swirly colored glasses—an incongruously suburban touch in this all-throbbing, all-clanging hi-tech setting.

It took me a while to notice that there was a woman lying under a blanket on the sofa. Hopper sat down beside her and introduced her as his eldest daughter, Marin. She uttered a feeble "Hi!" and said she had rung the doctor and was waiting for him to call back. She seemed to have flu, so I offered her an Anadin from my handbag. Marin examined it closely and asked me to name the ingredients. Of course I couldn't, so we both struggled to read the small print on the packaging. Luckily her doctor rang soon afterwards and Marin asked if it was OK to take Anadin, and he reassured her that it was. I suppose if you are Dennis Hopper's daughter, you are brought up to be wary of strangers bearing pharmaceutical gifts.

It was distinctly odd trying to interview Hopper with his sick daughter lying on the sofa beside him. Once or twice, when I was asking about his drugs and his drinking and his failed marriages, I suggested that we might move elsewhere but he said no, it was fine. But when I got back to London there was a message saying, "Delete all references to Marin." No way, José. He imposed Marin on me—we could have done the interview downstairs and I need never even have met her. Or she could have stayed in bed where she belonged. Actually, she perked up after a bit, maybe thanks to my Anadin, and chatted while he took phone calls. She is thirty-eight (five years older than her current stepmother), and till recently worked for *Elle* magazine in New York. But I found it tiresome that

whenever he laughed—a particular sort of heh-heh Aren't-I-a-wacky-drug-monster cackle—she would do it too, louder, and then he would do it louder still, and they would set each other off into a ghastly hyena antiphon.

Heaven knows Dennis Hopper is quite difficult to interview anyway, partly because he has certain set-piece riffs that he does for every journalist, but also because his career is so large and so diffuse you hardly know where to begin. He has acted in more than fifty films, including classics such as *Blue Velvet* and *Apocalypse Now*, and directed half a dozen, starting with *Easy Rider*. FilmFour's recent retrospective, *Dennis Hopper—Hollywood Rebel*, showed a good range of his film work, but only a fraction of it.

He also has a secondary career as an artist and photographer (some of his photographs can be seen at www.eyestorm.com and also in a monograph published in 1988 called *Out of the Sixties*). And then, as we have seen, he is a serious collector of contemporary American art, now on to his third collection, having lost the first two to divorce. He has been married five times and has three children, ranging in age from ten to thirty-eight. All this, despite having blown away a large chunk of his life with drugs and alcohol.

He has been around so long—he was in *Rebel Without a Cause* with James Dean in 1955. He was discovered as a teenager acting Shakespeare at the San Diego Old Globe Theater, and signed on a three-year contract to Warner Bros. But in 1958 he had a stand-off with director Henry Hathaway on a movie called *From Hell to Texas* and was told he would never work in Hollywood again. So he went to New York, worked as a photographer, got in with the art crowd (he bought one of Andy Warhol's first soup-can paintings for $75), and studied Method acting under Lee Strasberg. He married Marin's mother, Brooke "Haywire" Hayward, the daughter of film star Margaret Sullavan, and through her met her childhood friend Peter Fonda, with whom he made *Easy Rider* in 1969.

*Easy Rider* is the film by which he must stand or fall. He says it is his masterpiece, his pitch for posterity, and it is his, all his. He wrote, directed, acted in it. No matter that the writing credits read Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Terry Southern—"Terry Southern never wrote one fucking word of *Easy Rider*. Only the title *Easy Rider* came from him. He broke his hip; he couldn't write. I used his office and I dictated the whole fucking thing in ten days." Surely Peter Fonda made some contribution? "He did. He had a name. He had a credit card. And he loved motorcycles [Hopper hates them]. But Jack Nicholson was the one who put the deal together,

he went in and told them there was no way they could lose money on a motorbike picture."

Rashly, I mention Peter Biskind's book *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, which purports to tell the background story of the film, and it is like lighting the blue touchpaper. "Total horseshit! I read one chapter and decided it was a good thing I was homicidal rather than suicidal—except I didn't know who to kill, there were so many people up for it. My brother-in-law, Bill Hayward, said I was the worst editor he'd ever seen—as if he'd know an editor if he saw one. And then Peter Fonda called me a fascist punk. And Buck Henry said there was no director on that movie—the movie directed itself! Oh really! Great! These are really good friends, nice people, people you just want to have over and cuddle. With your gun at their heads, heh heh!" And he and Marin go into one of their hyena fits.

Well, I said, according to Biskind he was out of his head most of the time and he certainly didn't sound like a fun drunk. "I was a productive one! And they were a bunch of pussies. I went out and made a movie and put it together and they posed a lot and afterwards took a lot of credit for doing absolutely nothing. I was hellbent to make a movie—I mean, talk about obsession. I didn't give a fuck if I ran over people in the street: if they got in the way, then they'd better get out of the way—that was my objective and that's what I did. And at the end of it there were a lot of people standing there wondering what had happened and thinking that I'd ruined this great masterpiece they were going to make. And then when they suddenly realized I'd gone and made the masterpiece, they all started talking about how much they'd done on it."

Right, right, I say soothingly, noticing that Marin has gone quite rigid under her blanket, whether from fear or boredom I'm not sure—I suspect she has heard this rant nine hundred times before. Anyway, at the time he certainly got the credit for making *Easy Rider*—he was on the cover of *Life* magazine and the studio gave him carte blanche to make his next project, *The Last Movie*. According to Biskind again, it was a disaster—first the filming in Peru, which attracted every freak and cokehead on the continent, and then the editing in Taos, which dragged on for a year and "kept growing, like a malignancy." When Universal executives finally saw the movie, they released it just long enough for the critics to pan it, then buried it. But Hopper is still very proud of it. "It won the only award given at the Venice Film Festival in 1971—it would be nice for people to look at it."

But *The Last Movie* effectively ended the brief bankability he'd gained from *Easy Rider*—no major studio would back him again. "I didn't di-

rect again for twelve years and during that period Spielberg, Lucas, Francis [Ford Coppola] all went on and had tremendous success while I was watching it all happen." Anyway, by this stage, he was deep into drugs and alcohol, drinking half a gallon of rum and up to twenty-seven beers a day, then using three grams of cocaine—"lines the length of a fountain pen every ten minutes"—to sober up. He didn't bother to hide it, either—one director told Biskind he went through a script with Hopper, working out which drugs he'd take for which scene and marking them on the call sheets. And yet even in the seventies—his lost decade—he still delivered some great performances, for instance in Wim Wenders's *The American Friend*, and possibly the greatest of all as a drug-crazed war photographer in *Apocalypse Now*, though most of his scenes were cut.

He cleaned up in the mid-eighties and says that one of his best acting years was the year he turned sober, 1986, when he made three very different films, *Blue Velvet*, *Hoosiers*, and *River's Edge*, back to back. Since then his performances have gone up and down—he was great in *Waterworld* and *Basquiat*, but terrible by his own admission in *Super Mario Bros*. He chooses roles purely on the basis of when he's available, because he'd rather be working than not—hence the wildly variable quality of his filmography.

Perhaps this is why he's never won an Oscar, and thinks now he never will. "You know, I've been scraping the bottom of the creative bowl here in Hollywood for so long that I don't really get any of the roles that one gets nominated for. I'm not on their A list at the studios, nor on their B list nor their C list nor their D list. So I have to go out and do independent films that most of the time never see a theatre, go directly to video or Home Box Office. Some of them turn out very well, but you don't win Academy Awards for things that go straight to television. I was in a producer's office the other day with a script he wanted to do of mine and he said, 'Now if you can get these actors'—and he gave me a list—'I can get you $90 million; if you can get these actors, I can get you 70; these 40, and these 15 to 20.' And my name wasn't even on the list! I'm not bankable on any level." So is he bitter about it? "No! Just because I'm green and look like The Grinch! No. I'm too old to be bitter. And it's been that way for my entire career, except for one moment after *Easy Rider*."

So he works as a jobbing supporting actor and, between films, gets on with his art. He has spent most of the past two years assembling a big retrospective of his artwork for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It opens in mid-February, and goes on to Vienna at the end of May. It consists of "photography, painting, sculpture, light machine, billboard, sets,

video, digital work—just about everything." He has no hopes of making money from his art. "I do it totally out of an ego problem, that's all."

The ego problem—this is the crux of Dennis Hopper, but what is it exactly? It's something to do with coming from nowhere—an alfalfa farm in Kansas—and having a huge ambition—nothing less than to be a genius. His determination to be a genius was, perhaps still is, total, but he never quite decided what sort of genius he would be. Joanne Woodward remarked when he was in his twenties: "Dennis is a genius. I'm not sure of what, and I'm not sure Dennis knows of what. Certainly not acting. But he is a genius."

Unfortunately he made the common mistake of studying the lifestyles of geniuses rather than the work—what one might call the If-I-cut-off-my-ear-I-will-paint-like-Van-Gogh delusion. He observed that great actors were often drunks, so he started drinking, and then he observed that some of them also took drugs, so he did that too—"It was all like part of the creative process to me." And in the beginning, he insists, it was creative—all the energy from the drugs went into his film work. But eventually it became just boring old addiction. "We were all going to hold hands, take LSD, find God—and what happened? We ended up at the drug dealer's door, carrying guns and in total madness."

The madness finally overcame him when he was making a film in Mexico and ran off naked into the jungle—"I thought the Third World War had started. I masturbated in front of a tree and thought I'd become a galaxy—that was a good mood!" he roars, going into a fit of the heh-hehs with Marin obligingly heh-hehing along. He loves telling this story—he tells it to every interviewer. He ran about in the jungle all night and was eventually picked up by the police and put on a plane back to Los Angeles, but he thought the plane was on fire and tried to climb out of the emergency exit. Pause for more heh-heh-hehs.

Anyway, the upshot was not so funny—he was put in a psychiatric hospital and given an antipsychotic drug which gave him all the symptoms of Parkinson's disease. "It lasted for three months without them knowing what had happened. I was in lockup cleaning toilets and shaking so badly I screamed: 'I can't do it,' and the guard said, 'You're going to do it!' but I couldn't hold the rag. I couldn't make a gesture, I couldn't speak, and I was taken to three meetings a day and they'd say, 'This is what happens if you use drugs and alcohol.' And this went on for a long time, but finally I got through all that. Quite honestly, I was in such bad shape that to survive and to come out with a mind and to have a second chance was really an amazing thing."

Meanwhile three marriages had come and gone and two children—Marin and another daughter, Ruthanna, by his third marriage—had grown up barely seeing him. This was a subject I didn't want to raise in front of Marin, but he insisted, "No it's fine. Go ahead." OK, I said, the Biskind book claimed he was violent to his wives. "Well, I didn't read it, so can you tell me what it said?" "It said you threatened Brooke Hayward so much that she ran away." "I don't know about threatened. I hit her. There was a moment when I became violent with her. And she was probably afraid of me after that. That was a very young and stupid mistake because I didn't understand her illness." Her illness? "Yes. She had an illness. She was manic depressive and I couldn't cope with it. So that was that one. What was the next one?"

Wife number two, Michelle Phillips of the Mamas and Papas. According to Biskind, "Hopper terrified her and her daughter Chynna by firing guns in the house, and handcuffing her to prevent her from running away, saying he thought she was a witch." "Oh Michelle," Hopper says wearily. "Well, we were married for eight days and we did everything we could possibly think of. Then she went off to sing with Leonard Cohen and she said, 'I've decided music is my life and I never want to see you again.' So. When I was young, was I aggressive towards women? Yes. If we had an argument and they physically attacked me, I didn't have any problems treating them much as I would a male. I slapped a few women. But that, very honestly, ended with alcohol. I've never threatened my current wife and we've been together nine years."

What about his last wife, Katherine LaNasa, whom he married when she was twenty and by whom he has a ten-year-old son, Henry Lee? "No, I didn't use violence on Katherine LaNasa, even though she used it as an excuse in court. I was sober and I used no violence on her." Why does she say you did? "Because she could. Why do people say I didn't write *Easy Rider*? Because they can." He and LaNasa divorced in 1991 when their son was only one and he has been fighting for equal custody ever since. At present the boy lives with him five days a fortnight—Hopper showed me his room, which featured a Julian Schnabel crockery painting among all the normal schoolboy clutter. "I missed my daughters' upbringing and I tried to be so involved in this one, but karma has dealt me the same kind of hand again—it's been hard on me."

Karma indeed. Anyway, his current marriage seems to be surviving, though it is still childless. He has been with Victoria Duffy nine years, since she was twenty-four, and is very proud of the fact that she is a champion three-day eventer who trains her own horses. But she is

younger than his daughter and he admitted when they married that the age gap scared him. Has it been a problem? "Well, I mean, so far, so good. It's a problem when I look in the mirror, not with my mind."

His mind is still bent on being a genius, on leaving something for posterity. "I'd like to establish a place in time. I went to a party the other night—Nic Cage and Francis Ford Coppola had a party—and I said, 'This house is really familiar' and they said, 'Well, it's Dean Martin's house.' They didn't say it was Coppola or Nic Cage's house; it was Dean Martin's house. And David Lynch said, 'Yes, and he's gone and we're standing here now and just in a flash there'll be another group standing here and we'll be gone.' The only reason you go into art is that you hope you can cheat death a little by leaving something that's going to last a little bit beyond your own time."

Will he succeed? He's pinning his hopes on *Easy Rider*, but even if he gets all the credit, it's not exactly *Citizen Kane*. By any normal standards, he's had a good film career and an immensely long one—almost half a century—but not by the genius standards he sets himself. Perhaps that's why he's awkward about being interviewed—perhaps that's why he needed Marin for support. He told me, "I'm an introvert by nature. Social things are not my best. I would prefer sitting quietly rather than thinking that I have to make some sort of conversation to prove myself, advance some philosophies. I was always unbearably shy. That was probably one of the reasons that I drank and took drugs. And also because of the roles that I played, and people expecting me to be those roles or they were disappointed."

I wasn't disappointed exactly, but I found it terribly oppressive to be in his company—or maybe it was just the house. When I left, he came to the door to see me off, and actually stepped outside for a minute and I thought: "How brave of him, to come outside!" And then I almost skipped across the street, taking deep breaths of freedom, while he went back inside his castle and clanged the steel door shut.

# Dennis Hopper

*Interview*/2004

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**Q:** Where were you born?
**A:** [*laughs*] Dodge City, Kansas.

**Q:** When and where did you first say to yourself, "I want to be in the movies"?
**A:** I came out of the Dust Bowl, and when I went to the theater with my grandmother and saw my first films—singing cowboys. I wanted to be in movies. I wanted to know where they made them. I wanted to know how they made them. And I also wanted to get out of Dodge. [*laughs*]

**Q:** What's the thing that made the world first sit up and take notice of you?
**A:** You can look at that question two different ways: What was the breakthrough for me, or what was the breakthrough for the world? The breakthrough for me was probably the first time I was on stage at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego when I was thirteen. I played the urchin in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. And then I was in *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant* with James Dean in another era. Making *Easy Rider* when I was thirty-one is another. So the answer sort of goes through different periods. *Blue Velvet* is another one. They sort of keep going . . .

**Q:** Who or what would you be willing to wait in line for?
**A:** Well, I tell you, I did stand in line once to meet François Truffaut. It was at the New York Film Festival when he had *Day for Night*.

**Q:** What makes you different?
**A:** Desire and innocence.

**Q:** If you had a chance to recreate any scene from any movie, what would it be?
**A:** Well, as a director or an actor? You're asking the same person. I wouldn't want to recreate anything. Unless it's take two.

**Q:** When you're not working, what is your favorite way to spend a Saturday?
**A:** Normally, I would go play golf.

**Q:** What's worth fighting for?
**A:** The moment of truth.

**Q:** Finish this sentence: The most beautiful thing in New York is . . .
**A:** The first thing that jumped to my mind is the Empire State Building.

**Q:** Is America still the land of the free?
**A:** Yes.

**Q:** How would you define ambition?
**A:** Drive.

**Q:** What was the first performance you were in awe of?
**A:** There were two; I saw them the same week. *A Place in the Sun* with Montgomery Clift and *Viva Zapata!* with Marlon Brando. Same week, first time I ever saw either one of them. I was thirteen. That probably changed my life. Well, it did change my life.

**Q:** What scares you?
**A:** I guess the unknown, death. It doesn't scare me, but it's there.

**Q:** Andy once said, "A good reason to be famous is so you can read all the big magazines and know everybody in all the stories."
**A:** [*laughs*] That's great. Being famous usually gets you a pretty good table in a restaurant. But can you pay the bill? See, that's the other end of it. I think some people have a really, really hard time with it. Some people really go for it, and others really have problems with it.

**Q:** What's coming up next?
**A:** There's some movie stuff.

**Q:** You're not just an actor and a director. You're also an artist. What's up on those fronts?
**A:** Well, what's coming up next is a show of my photographs in October in the Godt-Cleary Gallery at the Guggenheim in the Mapplethorpe Gallery in the spring of 2006. It's going to go through the summer. And the rest of my retrospective is going to be at MASS MoCA in Massachusetts. It'll be everything, including my videos, the billboards, the big sculptures, all of it.

# Dennis Hopper Is Riding Easy

Alex Simon/2008

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The Hollywood landscape is littered with tragedies, broken promise, and self-destruction. Many promising artists stumble once and never recover from that initial fall. In the history of American film, there has never been a phoenix-like story of survival and rebirth quite like that of Dennis Hopper, who has gone from Warner Bros. contract player in his late teens, to Hollywood outcast, to renowned artist, photographer, and art collector, to the man who brought independent cinema into the mainstream with *Easy Rider*, to being outcast again and nearly destroyed during a period of heavy drug and alcohol abuse. There are single incidents of self-destruction in Dennis Hopper's life that most human beings could never walk away from in one piece, and by his own admission, Hopper repeated these incidents dozens of times over decades, until getting sober for good in 1985.

Hopper has also had a Zelig-like ability to have been surrounded by some of the film, art, and political world's most significant players: James Dean, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Martin Luther King, Marlon Brando, John Wayne, Miles Davis, and dozens of other legendary names that could fill every page of this blog and turn it into a history book. Few Hollywood players have led as rich, and varied a life as that of Dennis Lee Hopper, who was born May 17, 1936, in Dodge City, Kansas. Hopper has appeared in two hundred films and television productions since 1955, with 2008 showcasing "Dennis the Menace," as he was nicknamed in his *enfant terrible* days, in no less than eight feature films, the best being Isabel Coixet's superb *Elegy*, with Hopper in a masterful turn as Sir Ben Kingsley's best friend and confidant, and the lead in the Starz network's first original series, *Crash*, based on Paul Haggis's Oscar-win-

ning film, telling a tableaux of tales about the disparate denizens of Los Angeles. Hopper scores big again with his manic portrait of a legendary record producer who seems to be constantly teetering on the precipice of madness or epiphany.

A long-time Venice resident, Dennis Hopper has been named one of the top one hundred collectors of modern art in the world, and was recently honored by the Cinematheque Francaise in Paris with a retrospective of his work. Mr. Hopper sat down with *Venice* Senior Editor Alex Simon recently over a cigar, and discussed his life as Hollywood's greatest survivor. Read on . . .

**Q:** You've had a busy year. Let's start by talking about *Crash*.
**A:** I had just gotten back from the Cannes Film Festival, and my agent called and asked if I'd like to do a TV series. They said it was an incredible part and based on the film *Crash*, which won all the Academy Awards. The kicker was I had two days to decide! (laughs) But I'm glad I did it. It's been a lot of fun and we're working very hard: sometimes working sixteen hour days, but nobody's complaining because the scripts are so good. We have no restrictions in terms of what we can say or do, and in many ways we have more freedom than we would on film, because we had a commitment for thirteen episodes. Then two days after I shot the first episode, I was in France where the Cinematheque in Paris had spent three and a half years working on a retrospective of my work and some of my art collection and took the fifth floor of the Frank Gehry building, where the cinematheque is located and built this virtual reality installation with twenty different screens that showed all the films I'd made, commercials I'd done, experimental films I'd made with Andy Warhol and Bruce Conner. It covered my entire career up till now, and it was really amazing.

**Q:** Every time I've been in Paris, *Easy Rider* seems to be playing somewhere.
**A:** Yeah, it played in one theater on the Left Bank for twenty years. It was a very narrow, long little theater. I kept seeing this woman who grew older and older over the years at all these film festivals. She'd walk up to me and say "It's still playing!" (laughs) I felt like a jazz musician in France, when jazz went sour in the States, the Europeans all sort of took over the jazz movement. I guess if you're a big enough failure, they really take you to heart! (laughs)

**Q:** You really do have the greatest Hollywood survival story, ever.
**A:** Yeah, and this is not a place where you want to try and survive. (laughs)

**Q:** Well, one could argue that Hollywood is a living metaphor for social Darwinism at its most twisted.
**A:** True, very true.

**Q:** Watching your character in the first episode of *Crash*, I thought to myself "So Frank Booth survived the gunshot to the head in *Blue Velvet* and became a record producer."
**A:** (laughs) Yeah, right!

**Q:** Who else would call someone an "eyeless fuck" but Frank Booth?
**A:** (laughs) Yeah, yeah. My first conversation with my penis in the limo with the young woman driver, it's pretty hairy. When I hire the new driver, who's black, and say "Gorillas in the mist, that's what the LAPD call you," he has no stop switch, my character. He says everything and insults everybody. He just goes for it.

**Q:** Which at one time could have described you.
**A:** Yeah, probably. I guess so. It was so long ago now, I can't remember. (laughs) Phil Spector and I had an office together for ten years, and people have asked me if I'm doing Phil Spector in this and I said "No. I'm doing me!" (laughs) The office was right up on Sunset before you go into Beverly Hills. David Geffen was in there for a while, too.

**Q:** I know you've done TV work before, going back to its infancy in the 1950s. How is working in TV a different process from doing a film, or is it?
**A:** Well, you have more time to develop a character, first of all. Instead of an hour and a half, you have thirteen hours, in this instance. Doing regular television you have lots of restrictions, but doing cable you have no restrictions and can push the envelope a lot farther. That said, you have more time to do a feature than you do a television series itself, because we're constantly under the gun, working twice a week with sixteen hour days. I have so much dialogue, though. I have all these speeches to memorize which really, if you look at them, mean nothing at all! (laughs) They're just these stream-of-consciousness rants. I'm like a little kid sitting in the corner memorizing this stuff all day and all night.

We're shooting it all in Albuquerque because (Governor) Bill Richardson is giving us such a good deal to film there. There's probably more movies being shot in New Mexico than anywhere else in the States. It's a drag because I have to leave my family, but the work is good.

**Q:** You also have a terrific part in one of the year's best films, Isabel Coixet's *Elegy*.
**A:** That's a brilliant film. I hope they get some awards so they'll mass distribute it. Penelope Cruz gives one of the best female performances I've ever seen. I'm very proud to have been part of that.

**Q:** How was working with Sir Ben Kingsley?
**A:** Sir Ben is great, man. All my scenes were with him, really. He's so comfortable to be with. He's such a good actor, you could just play moment-to-moment reality with him all day long. It's a pleasure to work with an actor who's that good. I had a ball with him, and he's very funny. He just gives and never pushes and is really there for you, has a great rhythm.

**Q:** Let's start at the beginning: you were born in Kansas.
**A:** Dodge City, Kansas, 1936, which makes me seventy-two years old. A guy who never thought he'd live to be thirty, who had a real shock when he made it to thirty-one.

**Q:** Is there a secret to being a survivor? Does it come down to genetics, to luck, to having a specific outlook?
**A:** I think it's probably a combination of all three. I had such a bad drinking problem, and it took a lot to get me sober.

**Q:** And you knew from a young age that you liked mind-altering experiences. I remember hearing you tell a story about snorting gasoline from your grandfather's truck . . .
**A:** Yeah, and I looked up at the clouds and saw clowns, until I ODed on the fumes and smashed up his truck with a baseball bat, thinking it was a monster, smashing out the lights. (laughs) I was about seven. (laughs) Not good, but that was the end of my gas-sniffing.

**Q:** What did your parents do?
**A:** My father served in the OSS during World War II and came back and went to work for the railway mail. So we moved from Dodge City when I was nine, and moved to Kansas City, where I lived until I was thirteen,

then we moved to San Diego. My father ended up managing the San Diego post office, and my mother, who had managed one of the largest outdoor swimming pools in the country—she was the backstroke champion of Kansas, and was on her way to the Olympics when she became pregnant with me—and then she managed a swimming pool in a suburb of San Diego called El Cajon. I started acting at The Old Globe Theater in San Diego when I was thirteen.

**Q:** When did you know you were an actor?
**A:** I wanted to be an actor from the time I saw my first films, which I think were singing cowboy pictures like Roy Rogers.

**Q:** What else do you remember about that time?
**A:** It was the Dust Bowl, so I had to wear a gas mask to school five days a week, and my grandmother would open the door and five inches of dust would blow inside. There were bread lines and soup lines, and it was really bad. The whole middle of the country had blown away. My grandmother used to fill her apron full of eggs and we'd go into town. She'd sell the eggs and we'd go to the movies, while my grandfather would be out working on his wheat farm. I got my first sheepdog from the Clutters, the family that was murdered years later that Capote wrote about in *In Cold Blood*. When I was eighteen years old I came to Los Angeles, went under contract to Warner Bros., and did *Rebel Without a Cause*, my second movie.

**Q:** I know both Nicholas Ray and James Dean were profound influences on you.
**A:** Yeah, Dean made a real impression on me. I thought I was the best young actor around, and then I saw him. I'd never seen anybody improvise before. I'd always been doing Shakespeare and other plays where everything was a preconceived idea, preconceived gestures, how I said a line . . . and here he was different every scene, adding things to the script. It was really confusing to me, initially. I grabbed him one night, and said "What are you doing?" And we talked for a while, and I asked "Should I go back and study with (Lee) Strasberg?" He said "No, no, no. Just start doing things, but don't show them. Don't indicate, or presuppose what you're going to do. Live in moment-to-moment reality. Instead of playing drinking your coffee, just drink your coffee. Just smoke your cigar, don't play smoking the cigar. You'll find the simplest things become very difficult the first time you get onstage or in front of the camera,

but eventually you'll get through all that. Just live in the moment." So that was the beginning of it. We did *Giant* together next, and he used to watch me on that picture and critique me afterward. When his character got older, he started asking me to watch him in those scenes and to tell him if I thought he seemed old. That was basically our relationship. We weren't great buddies who went out drinking or anything like that. He was five years older than me. That was quite an age difference at that point. Also, we thought of him as a kid because he'd done *Rebel*, but in point of fact, he was older than Elizabeth Taylor, who was considered an "adult."

**Q:** Didn't he also encourage you to pursue photography?
**A:** No, but he saw me taking pictures and said "If you're going to take pictures, don't crop them." I said "Why not?" He said "Because you're probably going to want to direct films someday, and you can't crop film, so learn how to frame full-frame, full negative." So from that day on, I didn't crop my photographs.

**Q:** Had Dean lived, would he have survived the sixties?
**A:** Oh yeah, I mean he was . . . first of all, Paul Newman, who was a good friend of mine and a great man, had made a film called *The Silver Chalice* which Paul took out an ad apologizing for, because it was so terrible, the two parts that made Paul a star: *Somebody Up There Likes Me* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, had both been cast with James Dean before he died.

**Q:** Do you know the book *Suspects* by the film critic and historian David Thomson?
**A:** No.

**Q:** He takes famous movie characters and tells you what happened to them after the credits rolled. He did a similar piece on what happened after James Dean "survived" his car crash, with one of the punch lines being that Paul Newman kept losing parts to him and eventually moved back to Cleveland, where he became a successful car dealer.
**A:** (laughs) That's so cool! Wow . . .

**Q:** What are some of your memories of Mr. Newman?
**A:** Well, I'd been friends with Paul since I was eighteen years old. When they lived out here in California, he and Joanne (Woodward), I'd be at their house a couple times a week, then when they moved back East, we

lost touch for a little while, but there was a five-year period where I was with them every week. He was a terrific guy, very generous with all his charity work, and just had a huge heart, from day one. He was one of the most unselfish people I've ever known.

**Q:** The two of you were in *Cool Hand Luke* which, like *Rebel*, had a who's-who of young talent that went onto bigger things.
**A:** Stuart Rosenberg directed that, his first feature, and he'd had us all in various television shows he'd directed for years. I'd starred in about five different shows he'd directed. I don't think I had one line of dialogue in that whole picture. I had some interesting physical business I did. Babalugats was the character's name. I just sort of mumbled a lot. (laughs)

**Q:** What was the atmosphere like on the set? I've heard that you all became pretty tight.
**A:** We did. We shot it all up in Stockton, California. We wore our chains and prison clothes all night. We'd go to sleep in this motel with our chains on, go into the restaurant and this little nightclub there, and we'd all be in our chains. (laughs) If a lady wanted to dance with a "prisoner" she could. (laughs) It was a fun shoot. Rosenberg was always fun to work with.

**Q:** And back to *Rebel*. What about Nicholas Ray?
**A:** Well Nick and I had a long, long relationship. He came and lived with me for a while. He showed up at the Cannes Film Festival when I was showing *Easy Rider* and asked to borrow $500, which I didn't have at the time. He said "C'mon, you can get $500." I said "I've been sleeping on the floor of a borrowed pool house for the last year editing this movie, being paid $140 dollars a month. I don't have any money." He said "Well go to (Bert) Schneider and ask for the money." So I went to Schneider and borrowed the money and gave it to Nick, who came back an hour later and said "I need another 500." I said "What you talking about?" He said "I lost it in the casino across the street." So he ended up living at my house in Taos, New Mexico, for about six months, until I got him a job teaching. He ran up a phone bill that was unbelievable, looking for Howard Hughes to convince him to back his next movie. But during *Rebel*, Nick was very open to what were then, in the fifties, very new techniques of acting.

**Q:** You became one of the first collectors of pop art. When did you first

discover Warhol, Lichtenstein, Ruscha, and the pop art movement?
**A:** I met a lot of the key figures at a place called Stone Brothers Printers, which was a place where they made mailers and did a magazine called *Semina*, which Wallace Berman put out. There was an old Chinese man named Mr. Chang who would dress in a Confederate General's uniform and perform Shakespeare, very badly, in a heavy Chinese accent out on Hollywood Boulevard, and would put his hat out. James Dean was a big fan of this guy, and would throw quarters at him. (laughs) He was having a poetry reading at Stone Brothers, so we went there, and that night I met Walter Hopps and later he and Ed Kienholz started the Ferus Gallery on La Cienega, which is where Andy Warhol had his first show, and he then went to the Pasadena Museum where he gave Marcel Duchamp his first retrospective in 1963. So, in 1962 everybody was talking about "the return to reality." I was a third generation abstract expressionist, which we all were, really. We were looking at a lot of the Bay Area painters, but really felt that they were just rehashing a lot of the old stuff, it wasn't a return to reality. It was nothing new. I walked into the Ferus Gallery one day, and Irving Blum, who was running the gallery said "Dennis, I want to show you something." He showed me two slides, one of which was of a soup can, and the other was a cartoon. It was Andy and Roy Lichtenstein. I went crazy, started jumping up and down and said "That's it! That's it!" Irving said "That's what?" I said "That's the return to reality!" Irving said "What are you doing tomorrow?" So we went to New York the next day, went to Andy Warhol's studio, and met Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, I saw the whole thing. That was it. I bought a Roy Lichtenstein called "Sinking Sun" for $1100, which I later lost in a divorce. A year and a half ago it sold for $17,870,000. I bought one of Andy's soup cans out here and I've been collecting since. That was a very exciting time in Los Angeles, in the early sixties, and that's when I had my first shows.

**Q:** It's interesting, because I think most people view pop art as an East Coast movement, not that it was born here.
**A:** Yeah, and all the East Coast guys came out here for the Duchamp retrospective. We were all so backward; we had a great thing to fight against: around 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum, one of the curators bought a Jackson Pollock. The board of directors got together and were furious, and refused to show it in the main museum, calling it "Communist propaganda."

**Q:** Where the hell did they get that?
**A:** Who knows? That's how backward we were! Then Kienholtz did "Backseat Dodge" which was this sculpture made out of wire, of two people that looked like they might be making it in the back seat, and they closed down the whole L.A. County Museum because of this. Around the same time, the LAPD came in and busted Wallace Berman's show at the Ferus Gallery and destroyed all his pieces out in the alley because he had a nude picture of his wife on display. But it was a great thing if you were an artist to be sort of underground.

**Q:** When you paint a picture, or shoot a photograph, is it a different process from when you act, or are you tapping into the same vein?
**A:** I think they're all different disciplines, but working with Strasberg, we worked with our senses, and brought back emotional recall and so forth. So I think you work with the same instrument, and just apply it to different disciplines. I was born in Dodge City, Kansas, and am really just a middle class farm boy at heart. I really thought acting, painting, music, writing were all part of being an artist. I never thought of them as being separate. I could never play music, but I'd always loved music, and I tried to apply that. *Easy Rider* was the first film to use "found" music that was popular at the time. Prior to that, most movies were scored with an orchestra. *Colors* was the first million-selling rap album, and I produced Miles Davis's last album for *The Hot Spot*. When I went under contract to Warner Bros., it allowed me to have a cultural life, instead of having to get a "normal" job bussing tables, or putting on a suit and tie and going into the office. I just never stopped painting, taking photographs, writing. There was no pressure to "put that childish stuff away." It allowed me to continue to be a child.

**Q:** You had a seminal experience with the director Henry Hathaway on a picture called *From Hell to Texas*.
**A:** (laughs) Yeah, that was in 1958, with Don Murray, Diane Varsi, and Chill Wills. I got into a lot of trouble on that. I was loaned out from Warner Bros. to Fox, and I didn't want to do the part, but Hathaway kept insisting. We had the most wonderful dinners, just a delightful, wonderful guy at dinner, and a screaming, yelling maniac on the set. (laughs) But I ended up working for him more than any other director, did three films for him by the end.

**Q:** But he was the antithesis of what you responded to: an old-school

director who carried a riding crop.
**A:** Yeah, yeah, and he'd tell you exactly where to move, how to walk, how to talk. He'd give you line readings. I was now trying to "live in the moment" and doing things without preconceived ideas, and I walked off the picture three times on location. He'd beg me to come back, and we'd have a wonderful dinner where he'd be utterly charming and I'd say "Mr. Hathaway, tomorrow I'd like to try the scene this way." And he'd say "Sure, sure kid. Whatever you say." And the next day on the set, he'd be screaming and yelling again, and I'd say "Mr. Hathaway, last night at dinner, you said I could try this." He'd scream "That was just dinner talk, kid, dinner talk! We're makin' a movie here, now get the fuck over there and hit your mark and say your lines like I tell ya!" (laughs) If you really wanted to drive him crazy, you'd put a paper cup in the scene: "Paper cup in a fuckin' western! They didn't have fuckin' paper cups in the old west, goddammit!" So the last day on the picture, I came on the set at Twentieth Century-Fox, and he said "Hey, good morning. See that over there? Know what those are?" I said "Well, those are stacks of film cans, Henry." He said "That's right. I've got enough film there to shoot for four and a half months. Did you know that I owned 40 percent of Twentieth Century-Fox?" "No, I didn't know that, Henry." "Well, I do. See that over there?" "Yeah, those are sleeping bags." "That's right. We're gonna do this scene till you do it my way," and it was a ten-line scene, "and we'll send out for lunch, for dinner, we'll sleep here for four and a half months, then we'll send out for more!" So we started about eight o'clock in the morning. Around eleven at night, after eighty-five takes, I finally cracked, and said "Okay, tell me what you want to do." I did it, then I walked out. It wasn't like somebody sent a black ball around after that, but word got around that I wasn't somebody you wanted to work with. Soon after that, I was dropped from my contract at Warner Bros. I went back to New York and I studied with Strasberg for five years. I didn't have another major role in a studio picture for nearly ten years, until Hathaway hired me again for *The Sons of Katie Elder* in '65.

**Q:** Around the same time, you cut your teeth directing for Roger Corman, directing second unit on *The Trip*. What was it like stepping behind the camera for the first time?
**A:** Well, Roger was the kind of guy who wouldn't give us any money, but would let us take cameras and equipment out on the weekends and shoot. Jack Nicholson had written the screenplay for that picture, and it was a wonderful screenplay. The stuff on Sunset Boulevard, and the acid

trip and the stuff in the desert was all stuff that I shot, because we didn't feel that Roger would have the inclination to shoot that stuff, so we did it all on weekends.

**Q:** You got to work with some of the great directors throughout your career, from day one. Who are some of your greatest influences behind the camera?
**A:** I'd say George Stevens, and Henry Hathaway, strangely enough. (laughs) Even though I fought with him a lot, he had a great leanness to his work. Nick Ray, on *Rebel*, was a big influence, just watching him allow Dean to do what he did on that film. I've worked with so many top directors, John Sturges was another great one. You learn something from everyone, even if they're terrible directors. A lot of directing is really like being a floor manager of a department store, where you're just managing all these different divisions, and time is your worst enemy.

**Q:** I heard that during the filming of *True Grit* that John Wayne chased you around Paramount with a loaded gun?
**A:** (laughs) No, that's not quite how it happened. He used to arrive on the lot via helicopter from his mine sweeper that he had moored in Newport Beach. He'd have a .45 strapped on his side, wearing army fatigues, and that's the way he'd arrive to work every day. This one day he arrived, and he wanted to know where "that Pinko Hopper was hiding." I was actually in Glen Campbell's trailer, hiding from him. He was screaming "My daughter was out at UCLA last night and heard (Black Panther) Eldridge Cleaver cussing, and I know he must be a friend of that Pinko Hopper! Where is he? I want to talk to him!" So he wasn't literally running around with a gun looking for me. He was walking around with a gun at his hip, but I think he wanted to have a political discussion, as opposed to committing actual manslaughter! (laughs) Anyway, nothing ever came of it. That was just Duke.

**Q:** Let's talk about how *Easy Rider* was born.
**A:** Peter Fonda and I were doing motorcycle movies: I did one called *The Glory Stompers* and Peter did one called *The Wild Angels*. Jack Nicholson did one called *Hell's Angels on Wheels*, all at American International Pictures. Peter had read a thing I wrote with Stewart Stern called *The Last Movie*, and I'd wanted to make it as my first film. Peter loved it and went around trying to raise money to make it, but wasn't successful. We'd promised each other that if we were going to do a movie, that it wasn't

going to be a motorcycle movie. So we wrote a screenplay together with a standup comic named Don Sherman called *The Yin and the Yang*, a comedy, and we couldn't find financing for that, either. Around three o'clock in the morning, Peter called me. He was up in Toronto promoting *The Trip* at the film festival up there. So Peter says that he's just talked with James Nicholson, no relation to Jack, and Sam Arkoff, who ran AIP, and I told them this idea for a movie: these two guys sell a bunch of marijuana in Mexico, then buy these two beautiful, gleaming bikes and ride cross-country to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, where they have a great time, then they go into Florida to retire, and are shot by a couple of duck hunters. Peter says "They said we could both act in it, and you could direct. What do you think?" (laughs) I said "They actually said they'd give you money for that?" "Yeah." So I said "Terrific, man. If they really said they'd give you the money, it sounds great to me." So that's how it started. Then when it came time to really do it, they pulled back and said I could act or direct, but not both. So we went to see Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, because they'd just finished doing *The Monkees* and our friend Michael McClure, a poet from San Francisco, he had a project called *The Queens* he wanted to do which was a satire about LBJ and Dean Rusk, and all these powerful Washington insiders dressed in drag, eating live lobsters, talking about how they assassinated President Kennedy. It was going to be a twenty-minute short. We decided to pitch it to Rafelson and Schneider, Peter couldn't help but talk about what was then called *The Loners*, and by then we had a full outline. Schneider left the room, then Rafelson left, who came back and said "Can I see you in my office?" So we went in and he said "Call Schneider at home tonight. I think he's going to give you the money and let you act in it and direct it." And Schneider said "Yeah, it's a go."

**Q:** And it was groundbreaking on so many levels: the first movie to really address the counterculture seriously, not in an exploitative way. The first to show people openly using drugs. The first to show some of the serious social problems that were happening in the country, particularly in the Deep South, where you actually shot some of it.
**A:** Yeah, and like I said before, it was the first time found music was ever used. At that time it was so much cheaper. All I had to do was go to the artist and ask their permission to use the music.

**Q:** So was the decision one that was based more on economics than on creativity?

**A:** No. I went out and shot the movie in five and a half weeks. Laszlo Kovacs said it was the best-organized picture he'd ever shot. When we spoke at AFI a few years before he died, he said "People talk about how crazy the shoot was, but there was nothing crazy about that shoot." The thing was, after shooting the film I came back to eighty hours of footage that I hadn't seen, because in those days there was no way for me to see my dailies out on the road. I had an editing job that was just horrendous, took me over a year. And driving on the way to the studio to cut the picture, I'd hear all this great music on the radio: Steppenwolf, Jimi Hendrix, The Byrds. I heard all these songs and cut the picture to picture, and not to sound. Then when I put in a song like "Born to Be Wild" it just fit perfectly. But when you see the movie, the story is told through the music, not the dialogue. It was just one of those things that worked.

**Q:** Has MTV ever acknowledged you of being an early inventor of music video?
**A:** (laughs) No, I don't think so.

**Q:** *Easy Rider* changed Hollywood.
**A:** Yeah, it certainly showed them that they could make independent films. You had to get an I.A. union stamp on your film to get released in those days, and we didn't have that stamp. Bert Schneider's father Abe was Chairman of Columbia Pictures and paid off the unions, gave them $25,000 so we could release the movie, which broke the code, and other studios saw that they could do the same thing: make a non-union film and then make a deal with the union to distribute it. Cassavetes was really the only person in the U.S. who'd been making independent films up to that point, because he was from a well-to-do Greek shipping family that allowed him to finance his own low budget films. But he could never really get them distributed, because the majors wouldn't distribute them.

**Q:** I read a quote attributed to you, and maybe you can tell me if it's accurate: "There are moments that I've had some real brilliance, you know. But I think they are moments. And sometimes, in a career, moments are enough. I never felt I played the great part. I never felt that I directed the great movie. And I can't say that it's anybody's fault but my own."
**A:** Well, I could agree with everything but the last part. It wasn't all my fault.

**Q:** You don't feel that *Easy Rider* is a great film?
**A:** I do. I do, but after that I should have made another great movie and *Colors* is an alright film, but I don't know, I just never felt I directed the film I really wanted to direct after *Easy Rider*. I know I never did. But I don't think it was my fault that I wasn't allowed to. I had a lot of help on this end. It may have been my behavior that caused the rift to happen, but once it happened, it wasn't my fault. I could've brought them a ship full of gold, and they wouldn't have let me direct a picture after my fall-out with Lew Wasserman over *The Last Movie*. He wanted me to re-edit it after the Venice Film Festival. I had final cut and said "no." He said "Then it will never be distributed."

**Q:** Let's talk about *Apocalypse Now*. What are some of your memories of being in the Philippines doing that?
**A:** I was there for four or five months. When I arrived I was signed to play a CIA agent. There was no script. So I started out in a clean uniform being told by Francis (Coppola) that I was going to be second-in-charge to Marlon Brando's army he had in the jungle. I was with these guys about three weeks and we were training with these Green Beret guys who'd just gotten out of Vietnam, playing war games. We had mortars that we'd play with that were full of powder, and if you got any of the powder on you, that meant you were dead. We had all these war toys we'd play with at night. We'd be assigned to hold a bridge. Would they be coming by the sea? Would they be coming through the jungle? We'd play these incredible war games and just had a ball. Finally Marlon arrived and everything was shut down for a week because he realized Marlon hadn't read *Heart of Darkness*, so Francis went out to read Marlon *Heart of Darkness* and nine hundred people, the cast and crew, just sat and waited! (laughs) We called it "the million dollar week" because Marlon was getting paid a million dollars a week. When he came back he said "Marlon and I agreed that your part should be as large as his, or maybe larger." When you read *Heart of Darkness* you never actually see the Kurtz character, you only hear about him being talked about by this Russian-Jewish trader, who comes out with shrunken heads and thinks he's such a great man. So Francis wanted me to play that part, and made him a photojournalist who carried a lot of cameras instead of shrunken heads. So we started there, and wrote a little bit in the morning and then would just improvise off of that.

**Q:** So those scenes between you and Martin Sheen, when he was locked in the bamboo cage, were largely improvised?
**A:** Yeah. I mean, it was improv that came out of writing.

**Q:** And you and Brando were never actually on the set together, right?
**A:** Yeah, he'd shoot one night, then I'd do another. I came in one night and Francis said "Marlon called you a 'sniveling dog' and threw bananas at you." So I had this prop man throwing bananas at me all night long. (laughs) And that's how we worked for a couple weeks. It was Marlon's decision for us to work separately and at the time, I was sort of offended by it, but looking back, I think Marlon did me a big favor. If you're improvising something, and he suddenly started reading *Hollow Man* by D. H. Lawrence, you really can't get something going if you have two people vying for (the director's) time. In the end, it worked out really well.

**Q:** In 1986 you had a renaissance in your career with three amazing movies: *River's Edge*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Hoosiers*, the last of which earned you an Oscar nomination. It marked a real comeback in your career, and you haven't stopped working since.
**A:** That was my first year of sobriety, too. I'd been out of rehab like two months when I went in to do *Blue Velvet*, then I went straight to Indiana and did *Hoosiers*. I didn't do anything but get a haircut and put on some different wardrobe, then came back to Los Angeles and did *River's Edge*. It's funny because I play a drug addict in one, an alcoholic in the other, and a drug dealer in the third! (laughs) So my first year of sobriety was a test. (laughs)

**Q:** We have to talk about the character of Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet*. I read an interview with David Lynch where he said you called him after reading the script and said "David, you have to let me play this part because I am Frank Booth."
**A:** Well actually, he'd already cast me, but I did call him after he'd cast me, and we'd never met at that point, and said, "You haven't made a mistake, because I am Frank Booth." So supposedly he went back to the table with Kyle MacLachlan, Isabella Rossellini, and Laura Dern, they were all having lunch together, and said, "I just got off the phone with Dennis Hopper, and he said that he was Frank Booth, which I guess is really good for the picture, but I don't know how we'll ever have lunch with him." (laughs)

**Q:** How were you Frank Booth?
**A:** I'd come out of a heavy drug life, and had known a lot of people like Frank. I didn't mean that I was literally Frank Booth, but I'd certainly run into characters like Frank, and understood him. A big discrepancy came the first day we were shooting the big scene where Kyle is hiding in the closet and I come in demanding my bourbon and tell Isabella to spread her legs, and then this sort of horrendous rape scene occurs against her. None of us had met at this point and that was our first scene. (laughs) David had helium on the set, because in the script, the tank that Frank was constantly taking hits from was written as helium, which makes your voice really high, like Donald Duck. But it doesn't disorient you in any way, it just makes you talk funny. So I said to David, "You know I always thought of this as being nitrous oxide or amyl nitrate or something." He said "What is that?" I said "Something that disorients your mind for a few minutes. I'm also having trouble acting with my voice sounding like this. So could I just show you what it would look like with the other stuff?" And I did, and David said "Oh, that's great!" So we went with that, and I said "If you want to put the (helium) voice in later, in post, we can," and of course, we didn't. So that was the only real contribution I made to that film, I guess. (laughs) David had written a great screenplay, and there wasn't any reason to change anything else. Years later I was sitting, thinking about it, and I thought how really weird it would be if Frank Booth had only used the gas to change the sound of his voice, that it didn't affect his mind at all, and what a cold, calculating kind of guy that would be. *The Observer*, in England, and *Film Quarterly* gave me an award in Paris as the outstanding villain of all-time for that film, which is pretty heavy, because that means I beat out Sir Ben Kingsley in *Sexy Beast* and Anthony Hopkins in *Silence of the Lambs*. (laughs)

**Q:** Which brings us to *True Romance* and the scene between you and Christopher Walken, which has gone down as one of the great scenes in movie history. At the time, Quentin Tarantino was unknown. Did you know upon reading the script that a completely original voice had arrived?
**A:** Oh yeah, that was apparent immediately. I thought it was a terrific script and terrific movie, and it just died at the box office. All the buzz came out of tape and DVD. It was strange because I never saw it with an audience where it didn't get a standing ovation at the end, at Toronto and other places. It just didn't connect with mainstream audiences. Maybe it was the title, who knows? It's such a great, popcorn eating movie, you

know? (laughs) Tony Scott is a terrific director. The day we did that scene, we did the whole interior of my trailer here at the studio in Los Angeles. First of all, you don't see speeches like this as an actor in film anymore. It was just pages and pages of this great dialogue. Tony started lighting, was going to shoot with two cameras, and was going to shoot Chris Walken first. Chris came in and saw it, and Tony approached me and said, "Chris just said he didn't want to go first. Would you mind going first?" I said, "I don't mind going first, but you've been lighting for two and a half hours, man!" (laughs) Tony said he didn't mind, and reversed all the lighting and went on me first, and that's how we did it and it was just wonderful. The only improvisation in the whole thing, because Tarantino's script was so good, was the bit about the eggplant and the cantaloupe. Walken and I went out later, selling the piece as a team. And someone said to us, "Oh, you guys are great actors!" And Walken says, "I don't know if we're great actors or not, but I started out as a dancer, and Hopper and I partner real well together." (laughs) And I thought that was a great line.

**Q:** We touched earlier on your being a survivor.
**A:** I think it was genetics. I think it was luck. I think it was attitude that got me through a lot of it. I believe in miracles. It's a miracle that I'm still here. And I plan on being here a while longer.

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